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February 24, 2023

On the anniversary of Russia’s renewed bloody invasion of Ukraine, the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC) takes stock of where we are today one year later.

First, and foremost, Ukraine bravely fights on, defending its homeland against Russia’s blatant breach of international law, shockingly callous disregard of human rights and norms of civilized behavior. It should not be forgotten that Russia actually invaded Ukraine in February 2014 – nine years ago, and continues to occupy Crimea, and large parts of eastern Ukraine. The existential menace for Ukraine continues. Moscow’s continuing destabilizing belligerency endangers the region, Europe, and the global democratic order. This is a major security challenge for the United States, countries of the CEE region, and the world.

The United States and its allies must continue efforts to act in a timelier manner to address the challenge, aid Ukraine, and ensure that Russia is defeated and withdraws from all Ukrainian territory. Countries of the CEE region have been boldly facing Russian aggression, setting an example we hope the United States continues to emulate. President Biden’s visit to Kyiv and Warsaw, and meeting with leaders from the Bucharest Nine countries, presented an important stage for getting America’s message across for the benefit of democracy, decency, and the defense of Ukraine. The United States must continue to boldly lead and keep actions in step with these important words of support including providing the proper military aid necessary to ensure a Ukrainian victory.

The Putin regime must be held accountable for what it has wrought for its invasion of Ukraine. The U.S. and its allies and partners must continue to enact crippling sanctions against Russia’s ruling elite and economic infrastructure, to ensure that a heavy price is paid. The Wagner Group must be designated as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO), and Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism (SST). Russia is a terrorist state, by every definition. The CEEC strongly supports the Biden Administration’s statement that Russia has committed crimes against humanity. Russia, and all responsible individuals including Mr. Putin, must be held accountable for war crimes against Ukraine.

The CEEC applauds the efforts of the Biden Administration, the U.S. Congress, and state lawmakers for keeping up the pressure through vital legislative responses, for continued statements of support, direct military aid, and visits to Ukraine and the CEE region. Strong measures of security assistance to Ukraine must continue. Additionally, as the next NATO Summit in Lithuania in July nears, there must be a push to consider Ukraine’s NATO membership. We must not forget that Ukrainian conflict is not only affecting Ukraine but the whole central and eastern European region – on Wednesday President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda hosted B9 summit in Warsaw, to discuss cooperation of the Bucharest Nine eastern – NATO flank in ensuring security of the region. President Joe Biden participated as well as presidents of Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary and Chech Republic. If now is not the time, then when? Ukraine is ready, willing, and capable – and deserving to be a NATO member.

The CEE communities in the United States reject Russia’s blatantly false historical narratives, lies, and deceit used to justify the invasion and to denigrate the Ukrainian nation. These tactics recall the days of Hitler and Stalin.

For years, the world has watched Putin’s kleptocratic mafia organization, which masquerades as the Russian government, terrorize Russia’s neighbors, and wreak increasing havoc around the world, whether by military infiltration of Belarus, creeping occupation in Georgia, bombings in Syria, energy blackmail, information warfare or cyberattacks.

We will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes to support its enduring independence and territorial integrity. Together, we will resist Russian bloody imperialist aggression and fight to remain free.