

2 March 2022 - Seul le prononcé fait foi

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Address to the Nation

People of France,
My fellow citizens,

Since President Putin's brutal attack on Ukraine on February 24, Russian forces have been shelling Kyiv and besieging major cities. Hundreds of Ukrainian civilians have been killed. Women and children were killed today. The days to come will most likely be increasingly difficult. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are fleeing to Moldova, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and gradually to the rest of Europe.

In the midst of a difficult moment unlike any we have seen in decades, we stand with Ukraine.

This evening I want to pay tribute to the courage of the Ukrainian people, who are resisting under fire.

And on your behalf, I want to offer France's brotherly support to President Volodymyr Zelensky. As the leader of an extraordinarily courageous people, he embodies honor, freedom and heroism.

Neither France nor Europe nor Ukraine nor the Atlantic Alliance wanted this war.

On the contrary, we did everything we could to avoid it.

As you know, I have been engaged in a rigorous, continuous dialogue with President Putin since 2017.

Amid worsening tensions, I traveled to Moscow and Kyiv on February 7 and 8 to seek alternatives to armed conflict. Several other European leaders supported that effort. As for the President of the United States, he expressed his willingness to negotiate after meeting with President Putin in person last June in Geneva.

It was therefore deliberately and alone that President Putin opted for war, rejecting the commitments he had made to the international community one after another.

This war is not a conflict between NATO and the West, on one hand, and Russia on the other, as some have written. NATO has no troops or bases in Ukraine. These are lies. Russia has not been attacked. It is the aggressor.

Still less is this war a fight against "Nazism," as a baseless propaganda campaign would have people believe. That is a lie. It is an insult to Russian and Ukrainian history and to the memory of our forefathers who fought side by side against Nazism. Russian leaders are attacking the memory of the Holocaust in Ukraine, just as in Russia they are attacking the memory of Stalinist crimes.

This war is the result of a revenge mentality fueled by a revisionist interpretation of European history that would have us return to the darkest days of empires, invasions and exterminations.

France and Europe responded immediately, unanimously and firmly to this flagrant violation of a European nation's territorial integrity and sovereignty. We did so in close coordination with the British, the Canadians, the Americans, the Japanese, and many other countries.

First, we supported the Ukrainian people by providing them with humanitarian conveyances and shipments of defense equipment and material.

Then, we worked with other nations to ensure that Russian leaders understand that choosing war will result in their country being shunned by other nations and condemned by history. The UN Security Council voted on a resolution deploring Moscow's violations of international law, and this afternoon, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to condemn the attack. In other words, the international community demonstrated its unity. Russian teams were excluded from major international competitions and many sporting and cultural events were cancelled. We are working relentlessly to convince nations on every continent to condemn the invasion, demand a ceasefire and respect humanitarian operations on Ukrainian soil, and we will continue to do so.

We swiftly adopted proportionate sanctions against Russia and its leaders. The assets of several hundred Russians close to the authorities were frozen in France and abroad. Several major Russian banks were excluded

from the international payment system, making a number of transactions impossible and causing the ruble to crash. Russian propaganda outlets were just barred from broadcasting in Europe.

On the ground, we have made sure we have the ability to protect our citizens, moving our Embassy in Ukraine to a different city and enabling all French or dual citizens to swiftly leave the country if they wish to do so. On your behalf, I want to thank all of the diplomats, police officers, soldiers and government employees who are continuing to carry out this effort and are looking after our fellow citizens in Moldova and at Ukraine's main border crossings.

I also want to thank all the journalists who are courageously covering this conflict and helping to guarantee freedom of information for all the world's citizens.

Finally, we took part in the NATO effort to protect the security and sovereignty of our European allies by boosting our existing military presence in the Baltic states and in the region. Several hundred French troops arrived in Romania yesterday as part of that effort.

We will continue to step up our diplomatic initiatives, sanctions against Russia's political and business leaders, and support for the Ukrainian people with the goal of ending the fighting.

And yet it must be said that we are not at war with Russia. We are mindful of our deep connections with the Russian people – one of the great peoples of Europe – who sacrificed so much during World War II to save Europe from the abyss. We stand with all Russians who refuse to allow an unworthy war to be waged in their name, and who have made it clear in Russia and abroad that they have a sense of responsibility and the courage to defend peace.

That is why I am not only in constant contact with President Zelensky but have also chosen to remain in contact with President Putin and will continue to do so as long as I am able and as long as it is necessary. To try time and again to convince him to lay down his weapons, to help with the negotiations under way insofar as France is able and, insofar as we are able, to prevent this conflict from seeping and spreading into other areas.

This war has already upset the balance on our continent and in multiple aspects of our daily lives and this balance stands to undergo major changes in the coming months.

This war will shake up our Europe. I will talk more about this in a moment.

Several hundred thousand refugees from Ukraine are currently being welcomed on our continent and this will continue to be the case. France will do its part. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our cities and towns for leaping into action. I'd also like to thank our nonprofits, which are working hard to welcome these refugees in the best possible conditions.

We are making preparations and will take care of the men and women who come to our country seeking protection. France will also do its part by welcoming children forced into exile after being separated from fathers who have stayed behind to fight. And we will do so in close collaboration with the nonprofits and NGOs that are already at work on the ground and in France.

Our agricultural system, our industries and many of our business sectors are suffering and will continue to suffer either because they are dependent on raw materials imported from Russia and Ukraine or because they export products to those countries. Our growth, which has reached its highest point, will undoubtedly be affected.

Hikes in the price of oil, gas and raw materials are impacting our purchasing power and this will continue to be the case. In the days to come, the cost of filling the tank, paying our heating bills and purchasing certain products will likely grow even steeper.

Faced with these economic and social consequences, there is just one thing that guides me and will guide me moving forward: protecting you.

We will support those business sectors with the greatest exposure by searching for new suppliers and new business opportunities. That is why I have raised this issue with my American, European and Middle Eastern counterparts.

We will provide appropriate responses to trade disruptions and price increases. I have also asked the Prime Minister to draft an economic and social resiliency plan over the next few days in response to these difficulties.

But make no mistake. The consequences of these events will be felt not only in the near term over the course of the coming weeks. They also signal the start of a new era.

War in Europe is no longer limited to our history books and our textbooks. It is here now, right before our eyes.

Democracy is no longer viewed as an undisputed system. It has been called into question right before our eyes.

Our freedom and the freedom of our children are no longer a given. Now more than ever, they require courage and the willingness to fight for them at all times.

We must meet history's sudden return to tragedy with historic decisions.

Therefore, our country will increase investments in our defense that were decided upon in 2017 and will pursue its strategy founded on independence and investments in our economy, research and innovation, which have already been strengthened in light of the pandemic.

During these trying times, our Europe is demonstrating remarkable unity, just as it has done over these last few months. Now Europe must agree to pay the price of peace, freedom and democracy. Europe must invest more in order to decrease its dependence on other continents and to be able to decide for itself. In other words, it must become a power that is both more independent and more sovereign.

First and foremost, it must become an economic power. We can no longer depend on others to feed us, take care of us, inform us or fund us. That is why, in keeping with the decisions made during the darkest days of the pandemic with the Recovery Plan for Europe, we must promote a new economic model founded on independence and progress.

Next, it must become an energy power. When it comes to our mobility, heating and the powering of our plants, we can no longer depend on others and, in particular, on Russian gas. That is why, after deciding to develop renewable energy and build new nuclear reactors for France, I will champion an independent European energy strategy.

Lastly, it must become a power for peace. We can no longer depend on others to defend us, be it on land, at sea, under the sea, in the air, in space or in cyberspace. To this end, our European defense must step up.

On March 10 and 11, I will bring together the European heads of state and government in Versailles for a summit where decisions will be made on these matters.

Our Europe has already proven its unity and determination. It has entered a new era. We must keep moving ahead.

My fellow citizens,

The war in Ukraine marks a turning point for our continent and our generation.

I know how understandably upset this war has made you. It spurs us on to action and compels us to make decisions. I will keep you informed.

This war also impacts our democratic life and our election campaign, which is set to officially begin at the end of this week.

This campaign will allow for a democratic debate that is important for France. However, it will not prevent us from agreeing on what is essential.

I know that I can count on you and your commitment to freedom, equality, fraternity and France's role in the world.

I will never stop defending these values and holding them high, in your name.

Vive la République.

Vive la France.