

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8939>



Ukraine solidarity

Brussels conference lifts Ukraine solidarity to higher plane

- IV Online magazine - 2025 - IVP603 - April 2025 -

Publication date: Friday 11 April 2025

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

The Brussels Solidarity with Ukraine conference on March 26–27 drew together about 200 activists from a score of countries, in support of the Ukrainian people’s national and social rights.

The gathering was organised by the [European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine \(ENSU\)](#) and the [Ukraine Solidarity Campaigns \(USC\) of England and Wales](#) and [Scotland](#). It was devoted to strengthening people-to-people solidarity, as the menace of Ukraine being partitioned and pillaged by Russian President Vladimir Putin’s and United States President Donald Trump’s governments looms ever larger.

The conference also took place in the context of ongoing conflict between Ukraine’s trade union, feminist, environmental, civil rights and progressive political movements and the neoliberal domestic policies of Volodymyr Zelensky’s government.

The choice of Brussels as host city was determined by the need to strengthen dialogue and collaboration between Ukraine’s many social movements, Ukraine solidarity groups and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and national MPs from left, green, social-democratic and progressive national independence formations.

Such parliamentarians — notably former Finnish education minister [Li Andersson \(Left Alliance\)](#) and [Jonas Sjöstedt \(former leader of the Swedish Left Party\)](#) — spoke at a [March 26 European Parliament event](#) organised by The Left group in the European Parliament (“Solidarity with Ukraine: Reconstruction and Civil Society”) and at the Solidarity with Ukraine conference itself.

In his European Parliament speech, Sjöstedt spelled out the double-sided character of progressive solidarity: “The war in Ukraine is not only raging on the front lines. The battles taken by labour rights defenders, climate activists and women’s rights activists are shaping and will continue to shape Ukraine’s future. We must stand up in solidarity with these movements, especially in times of war, and we will continue to do so.

“We must continue to stand up for worker’s rights in the drafting of new labour codes in Ukraine, we must fight for the health care workers who work under even more dire conditions, and we must continue to drive change to stop the ecologically disastrous Russian shadow fleet [of rusting oil tankers].”

Tanya Vyhovsky

Intervention from other elected representatives opened other key topics for conference discussion. A powerful example was Tanya Vyhovsky, [progressive Democrat Senator for the United States state of Vermont](#), who tackled the Trump threat to Ukraine head on.

“This is not business as usual, and unfortunately the vast majority of Democrats are acting as if it is ... the Musk-Trump agenda is a fascist agenda and the Musk-Trump-Putin agenda is a global fascist agenda.”

She added: “It is important for me personally [as a Ukrainian-American] that the war in Ukraine ends with a real peace. And that means no occupation, no land annexation; it means the Russian troops go home. It does not mean

holding the Ukrainian people hostage for resources.”

Resisting the Trump-Putin agenda was also not just about defending Ukrainian rights: “Anyone who thinks that this agenda is not a threat to them is delusional — it is a threat to all of us. It is a threat to our society and a threat to our climate.”

For Vyhovsky, the only possible response is “to build a global network for solidarity. The oligarchs and the billionaires and (frankly) mobsters that have taken over the US government, they have connections across this globe [...] they have a plan to divide up the world, treating it through the lens of capital, as assets only.

“We must stop that. And we can, and that’s through building international working-class solidarity and remembering that we are connected. What happens to Ukraine happens to all of us.”

Li Andersson

Finnish MEP Li Andersson led the discussion on a progressive defence policy — how to simultaneously provide Ukraine with the arms it needs to expel the Russian invader and for defence of the countries threatened by Putin’s ambitions while not buying into the militarist rationale of the European Commission’s €800 billion plan for “defence spending”, recently unleashed under cover of “standing by Ukraine”.

A key point made by Andersson was the need for a progressive defence policy to reject targets for defence spending being set as a proportion of gross domestic product: “I really think that setting such a target is a foolish way of measuring defence capabilities. Defence spending should not be based on abstract targets, but on needs and priorities.

“There have, for instance, been times when Finland needed to buy new airplanes. In such a situation, defence spending goes up. After the investment is made, however, it can and should drop — even below the NATO target of two percent.”

The plenary session on “What Peace?” saw interventions from [French Green MEP Mounir Satouri](#) (chair of the European Parliament’s human rights sub-committee) and [Danish Red-Green Alliance MP Søren Søndergaard](#). Both were focussed on the conditions that would have to prevail so that a just settlement of the war against Ukraine could at least be envisaged.

For Søndergaard, a just peace was unthinkable without a defeat of Putin’s invasion and Ukrainian involvement in negotiations about its own future: whatever ceasefire agreements Ukraine might have to accept in the interim, military support from EU countries would have to be maintained and increase if the Trump administration winds down or even ends its support for Ukraine.

Ukrainian activists inspired by solidarity

The conference was notable for the participation of Ukrainian social movement leaders and activists — the second largest contingent present after the local Belgians.

Brussels conference lifts Ukraine solidarity to higher plane

The interventions of speakers like labour lawyer [Vitaliy Dudin](#) (activist with the left Ukrainian force Social Movement), [Oksana Slobodiana](#) (leader of the health workers union *Be Like Us*), construction workers leader VasyI Andreiev (vice-president of the majority Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine) and Yuri Levchenko (leader of the People's Power, an initiative to build a Ukrainian party of labour), forcefully brought home the suffering and sacrifices involved in resistance to the Russian invasion.

This burden falls overwhelmingly on the shoulders of Ukraine's working people.

The importance of working-class and trade union solidarity with Ukraine's labour movement was a red thread running through the conference and was given special attention in a session that brought together Sacha Ismail, the USC (England and Wales) trade union liaison officer; [Cati Libre](#) (vice-president of the General Union of Workers in Catalonia) and Felix Le Roux from the radical French trade union confederation [Solidaires](#).

The next most profiled theme was that of the feminist struggle in Ukraine and women's role in the country's reconstruction. Yvanna Vynna from the grassroots feminist organisation Bilkis made a [memorable presentation](#) of her organisation's role in simultaneously supporting the defence effort while maintaining the fight for women's rights.

The ongoing struggle to defend civil liberties, particularly in the occupied territories, was treated by Mykhailo Romanov, representing the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, and Bernard Dréano, chairperson of the France-based Centre for Initiatives and Studies on International Solidarity and initiator of the [People First petition](#) (demanding the release of all captives resulting from the Russian invasion).

An important message came in a workshop by exiled Russian opponents of Putin's war. Maria Menshikova, correspondent of the banned magazine [Doxa](#), Dmitrii Kovalev ([Left for Peace without Annexations](#)) and Viktoria (representing [Feminist Anti-War Resistance](#)) all stressed that any victory for Putin's "special military operation" would be a defeat for the movement for democratic rights within Russia itself.

The success of the conference was best measured by the response of its Ukrainian participants. Speaking at the closing public meeting, [Oksana Dutchak](#), editor of the Ukrainian journal Commons, compared her mood before and after the event — sombre beforehand given the Trump-Putin moves to "fix" Ukraine behind its own back, and inspired afterwards to experience the wave of solidarity at the conference.

Solidarity counts. The job after Brussels is to make it stronger and more coordinated. One tool for that job will be the draft [Brussels Declaration](#), to be adopted in final form at a future teleconference and soon to be opened for discussion and amendment.

[Green Left](#) 7 April 2025

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.