

## **“It is not up to Putin to decide on the red lines”**

On Thursday, the chair of the European Parliament’s sub-committee on Security and Defence was in the first row to welcome president Zelensky. Nathalie Loiseau follows daily the war in Ukraine with a special focus on the relays of Russian propaganda in Europe. According to her, the first visit of the Ukrainian president is a turning point in the conflict.

### **What do you take away from president Zelensky’s intervention in the European Parliament this week?**

What strikes me is his insistence to speak as much as possible to the national parliaments and through them to public opinions. This is a testimony of the democratic path he has clearly chosen. When he said “Slava Ukraini” and we answered back with a traditional “Glory to the heroes”, we felt his emotion was genuine. I appreciated that he mentioned in his speech the funding by Russia of xenophobic movements in Europe. This designated clearly enough the pro-Russian far right. When he said that we are lucky to live in a peaceful, free and prosperous European Union, but that it should not be taken for granted, and that his soldiers are fighting to defend our values, I believe him.

### **As if Putin’s Russia was threatening us directly?**

I am convinced that his war and its consequences affect us directly. This is not a mere territorial dispute. When I listen to Putin, I hear his willingness to spread the conflict, as he feels threatened by NATO. However, what he is challenging is Ukraine’s model of society, which has grown closer to us, not only since last year but as early as 2014 and the pro-European revolution at Maidan in Kyiv. What Putin claims he wants to save, is a decadent West. In truth, his aggressiveness toward what we are is a threat to all and a call for others to follow his tracks.

### **Volodymyr Zelensky has begged for weapons to help him win the war, but he did not mention a possible peace. According to you, why is that?**

In the subcommittee I chair, we welcomed his main advisor, Andriy Yermak, who explained to us the ten-point peace plan presented to the G20 leaders by president Zelensky. But as everyone understood, and as Emmanuel Macron puts it, Russia cannot and should not win.

### **What does winning the war mean?**

It is not for us to say. It is not to the European leaders and to the allies of Ukraine to define the terms of a victory, but it is up to the Ukrainians themselves. Because they are the ones fighting and we have no right to tell them to stop this war under the pretext that it is hurting us while it is mainly costly and painful for them. This would be as shocking as if our allies would have asked us to stop the fight at Verdun, at the Chemin des Dames, because the war had already lasted for two years.

### **Why then European leaders did not commit to delivering fighter jets?**

Emmanuel Macron did not publicly exclude it. The British said they were ready to train pilots. Slovaks want to deliver soviet-era Migs. Swedish are also ready to engage on this path. There is a dark cloud over Putin’s head, which explains, by the way, the unbridled wave of Russian disinformation on the risks of a Third World War. Yet, it is not up to him to decide on the red lines of what we can or should do. If there is any escalation today, he is the one causing it in the Donbas by sending massive reinforcements and striking indiscriminately. In any case, the distinction between defending and attacking does not mean much nowadays as Ukraine is in a state of legitimate defence, even when it is to reclaim lands that were stolen by Russia, the only country to violate the borders that it had recognised in 1991.

**Do you understand the fears of the public opinion of an uncontrollable escalation?**

Yes, but I do not see any allies acting recklessly as warmongers. I am convinced that Ukrainian victory depends on us, even if we put the security of French and European people first and we do not become a party to the conflict. Just as the USSR did with North Vietnam when it provided weapons so it could free itself from American presence, then already a nuclear power.

To those, among us, who fear that every arms delivery brings us closer to a Third World War and who are calling for an immediate peace, thus acting as a mouthpiece of Russian narratives, I remind them that France is protected by its nuclear dissuasion and Europe by NATO. To yearn for peace without waiting for a Ukrainian victory is to wish for the capitulation of Ukraine.