

UKRAINE-RUSSIA: PRIDE, CONFLICT AND ON-GOING WAR.

Today marks day 372 since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. On 24th February, Putin launched what he described as a ‘special military operation’, ordering tens of thousands of Russians troops into north, east, and south of Ukraine.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warmed the heart of the nation and the world with his bravery; becoming a hero as he shielded his homeland and his people, who were faced with a very confronting truth: their lives would never be the same again.

When he was asked to evacuate Kyiv with the support of the US government, he immediately declined,

“The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride.”

Zelenskyy’s courage and leadership has acted as a pillar for Ukrainians and Ukrainian forces who were said to be putting up “furious resistance” against Moscow’s attempt to seize Bakhmut. Yevgeny Prigozhini, who is the head of Russia’s Wagner mercenary force said he has ‘seen no signs of a Ukrainian withdrawal.’

This is a true testament to the commitment and allegiance of Ukrainians – despite relentless shelling and ‘repel waves’ of Russian troops – when it comes to fighting for their people, and their home.

Russia has said to have lost at least 130 tanks and armoured personnel carriers in its three-week battle at the town of Vuhledar.

The office of the UN high commissioner for human rights (OHCHR) has recorded 21,293 civilian casualties in the country with 8,006 killed and 13, 287 injured. After making it through the long, cold winter, the escalation in conflict has triggered an emergency in humanitarian needs; with civilians leaving at a moment’s notice and fleeing into the nights cold; with fear and hope as their only blanket.

An estimated 12 million people inside Ukraine are in need of support and protection, says the UN, and another 4 million will need the same help in neighbouring countries in the next coming months.

One million people fled their homes in the first seven days since Russia invaded Ukraine – one of the fastest and largest migrations of humanity in recent years. In comparison, it took three months for one million refugees to leave Syria in 2013 when refugees were fleeing in the peak of its numbers.

Ukrainians received an uproar of support and found buried allies in countries such as Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Moldova and Romania who welcomed hundreds of thousands of people into their countries, with open arms and open minds.

German interior minister invited Ukrainian athletes to train in Germany in preparation for the 2024 Olympic games in Paris. Nancy Faeser said in a statement,

“We want to make our contribution, to help Ukrainian sportsmen and women in their preparation,”

She continued to state they will allow Ukrainian athletes to access Olympic training bases across Germany. This isn’t the first time Germany have accommodated training for refugees and aided in Olympic training.

Former Syrian Olympic swimmer Yusra Mardini was a member of the Refugee Olympic athletes’ team (ROT) that competed under the Olympic flag at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. She fled Syria in 2015 during the civil war, swimming across the Mediterranean sea on a boat before travelling through Serbia, Hungary, then Austria and finally, Berlin, Germany where Mardini now lives with her sister, Sara Mardini.

The hospitality Ukrainians were shown was highlighted positively by many, but many were also quick to point out the generosity was not receptive with refugees from Syria and Africa and suspected it stemmed from prejudice and bias.

Syrian journalist Okba Mohammad fled his hometown of Daraa in 2018. Currently located in Spain, he became the founder of a bilingual magazine in Arabic and Spanish. He described a sense of déjà vu as he followed events in Ukraine.

He recalls many similarities; getting rejected from boarding an overcrowded bus, parting ways with his family at the border, hiding and finding shelter from bombs. All experiences he shares with Ukrainians; all but without the welcoming tone of the globe.

“A refugee is a refugee, whether European, African or Asian.”

He explained the disheartening feeling of watching the change in tone of some of Europe’s leaders who, in the past, have presented strong, right-winged and extreme anti-migration views that send a message of disapproval and discrimination– that shocked Mohammad. Today, they’ve expressed a message that is unifying and auspicious.

“These are prosperous, middle-class people,” Al Jazeera English television presenter says. “These are not obviously refugees trying to get away from areas in the middle east.”

The channel issued an apology stating the comment was insensitive and irresponsible.

While the world heals the hearts of Ukrainians and helps where it can, Zelenskyy signals Kyiv is preparing soldiers for ‘counteroffensives and praised soldiers for defending the country.’

“We are preparing for the return of our warriors to actions for the liberation of our land,” the president alludes to a spring launch of counteroffensive Ukraine.

Putin’s worldwide alienation has strained Russia’s relationships all over, increasing risk of wider European conflict with tensions likely to increase between Russia and neighbouring NATO member countries.

Meanwhile, Finnish MPs voted 184 in favour of accepting the NATO treaties, with seven against and one abstaining. This rapidly increases Finland’s chances of joining the Trans-Atlantic defence pact, leaving its neighbour Sweden behind.

As secretary-General Antonio Guterres remarks to the UN security council “The guns are talking now, but in the end we all know that the path of diplomacy and accountability is the road to a just and sustainable peace.”

Is peace on the horizon for Ukraine?