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Zaki Laïdi, the European Union has been praised since February 24, as Bogdan Klich reiterated here on stage, that it has presented a unified front and acted swiftly. As far as you can, give us a sense of the discussions from behind the doors to bring 27 nations together at a time like this to speak with one voice. It could not have been easy, and I know that you are working on that front very diligently together with the High Representative. Is the unified front of substance or are there already cracks in it?

Zaki Laïdi

I think that the level of consensus in Europe is extraordinarily high. Just to give you an example, it took only two months to set up the military mission to Ukraine, whereas usually when we send missions to Africa it takes one year to 18 months. If you will allow me, I would like to make certain comments about the meaning of this conflict because if we do not concentrate and analyze the meaning, I am afraid we will be unable to think about the questions we raise, which is the way out.

First, in terms of global meaning, this war fundamentally marks the second death of the Soviet Union and, for me, this is the most important provisional conclusion. In terms of meaning, this war, and we have to remember it is a war of aggression conducted by a permanent member of the Security Council, is carried out against an independent and sovereign state for which Russia was supposed to guarantee the security, the integrity, including Crimea, through the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. That carried a risk for Ukraine because, in exchange for it, it relinquished its nuclear equipment, so the cost for Ukraine was extremely high. Since we are in an Arab country in the Gulf, the best comparison is the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein in 1991.

Second, the rationale of the war and why Putin is waging it. You need to read what Putin said and he wrote a very interesting piece in July 2021, which could actually have been written by other Russians, for example, Solzhenitsyn, though of course with much more talent. It means that the Ukrainian problem is not just the Putin problem, it would be a deep mistake to think that it is a Russian problem. What Putin said is extremely clear, he said that Ukraine should not exist because Russia, Ukraine and Belarus belong to the same ensemble, and they are the same nation. As you know, the Russians call the Ukrainians, the little Russians and the Belarus people, the White Russians. In his mind, they are part of the same nation because this is part of an Imperial vision of the Russian world. The question you could ask is why he waited until 2022 to wage this terrible war, which fortunately went miserably for the Russian army. The date,

the chronology of the war, launched on February 24 and the day before the invasion, he declared that Russia would recognize and support militarily the two puppet governments of the East of Ukraine. I am amazed to see that nobody knows why he made this statement on February 23 and I will ask the audience here that question. Can you tell me why this declaration was made on February 23? It was the day Yanukovich left Ukraine, and the day after was the beginning of the democratic process. People often say they did not accept Ukrainian independence but ask why they waited until 2022. Here again, the explanation is quite simple. As long as the political trajectory of Ukraine was compatible with the nature of the Russian regime, it was possible for Russia to manage the situation as they do in Belarus. However, since 2014, the political trajectory of Ukraine has become very different and far from the Russian evolution and then the danger started, to which Russia answered with the annexation of Crimea and the launch of the famous green men in the East of Ukraine. That is why he launched this war.

On our side, did we make mistakes? Yes, we made a lot of mistakes, and I will just mention them. I am sorry to give this background, but we cannot have a serious discussion on Ukraine without it. First, we never had a Ukrainian policy, our Ukrainian policy was a by-product of our Russian policy. That led to a certain number of uncertainties, mistakes, and hesitations, including the question of NATO, which I am not personally in favor of in the case of Ukraine, but we did not give a clear precise indication. The second big mistake was that we did not react to the occupation of Crimea, which I will remind you is part of Ukraine. Even during the independence referendum, 54% of the population of Crimea voted for independence. Of course, the figure was much lower than the other regions of Ukraine, but the majority was still in favor. We did not react and even worse, the sanctions against Russia after Crimea did not come after the occupation but after the plane was shot down. Third, we made a terrible mistake by increasing our dependence on Russian energy after Crimea. Of course, we can fully understand the reasoning of Mr. Putin who thinks that the Europeans are not acting swiftly and, after that, he made virtually all the possible mistakes, but he underestimated the role of the United States and Europe.

I will just finish on this, the commitment of the EU is dramatically underestimated. I am virtually sure that the majority of the attendees here believe that the American support is more important than the European. That is wrong, the last figure published by the Kiel Institute at the end, says that the commitments from the European Union, both economic and military, are superior to the commitments of the United States. As far as a military aid is concerned, the EU commitment is lower than the American one. But on a per capita basis; the level is similar. So we are very far from a situation in which Europe is just following the US. We are a major player in this war. And in a sense this is quite fortunate.

Ali Aslan

Thank you so much. Obviously, the historical background you provided is certainly key here and the last point about the Europeans actually stepping up to the plate and their aid at least having equal weight as far as Washington is concerned, is well noted here. We have 45 minutes left in this discussion and I want to go through one more round and take some questions from the audience members.