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## **Zelensky at the Italian Parliament: "Imagine Mariupol as Genoa". Draghi: "You defend our peace and our freedom"**

"You have shared our suffering and have contributed your heartfelt support to the Ukrainians since the first day of the war. The Ukrainian people will always remember your warmth, your commitment and your strength that must stop one person, one person only, to ensure that millions survive." Volodymyr Zelensky delivered a live-streamed address to deputies and senators gathered in the Italian Parliament amidst an emotionally-charged atmosphere. The remarkably warm welcome shown by MPs to the Ukrainian president was not marred by the controversies surrounding a number of variously justified absentees.

**"Our people has become our army when they saw the extent and scope of the enemy's heinousness, the extent of the destruction and the extent of the bloodshed", Zelensky said, recalling also his conversation with the Pope in his opening remarks.**

"Thousands are wounded, tens of thousands of families have been torn apart, hundreds of thousands of lives have been destroyed along with their future, millions of homes have been abandoned, and all of this was started by one person," said the Ukrainian president in a pained tone of voice, never explicitly mentioning Putin. To convey the scale of the tragedy in greater depth, he compared Mariupol, a port city of half million inhabitants, to the Italian city of Genoa: "In Mariupol there is nothing left, just rubble. Imagine Genoa in total ruin after having been under siege for three long weeks, subjected to constant shelling and gunfire. Imagine your Genoa and its residents fleeing on foot, by car, by bus, to find refuge somewhere safe." *Zelensky updated the tragic Ukrainian child death toll to 117, and called for increased sanctions and pressure to put an end to a war "prepared for years by one person."* "I am speaking from Kiev", underlined the Ukrainian leader, "the capital that saw the birth of a great culture of a great people." Just like Rome and every other city in the world, it is rightfully entitled to "lasting peace." Meanwhile, "this is where the missiles are falling today – he pointed out - and where Russian troops are sowing violence and destruction." Indeed, "their target is Europe, they want to influence your lives, they want to destroy your values: Ukraine is a gateway to the Russian army", Zelensky declared. Addressing the Chamber of Deputies, PM Mario Draghi reiterated his words moments later: "Today Ukraine is not only defending itself. It is defending our peace, our freedom, our security." The Prime Minister referred to the "heroic" resistance shown in all the places "where President Putin's fierceness has been unleashed." "Italy wants Ukraine to join the European Union", the Prime Minister said, even though the process will not be brief. "When horror seems to have the upper hand - Draghi said - that's when we must defend human and civil rights, democratic values. We must offer welcoming hospitality to those fleeing war. In the face of massacres we must respond with assistance, including military aid, for the resistance. *We must oppose the growing isolation of President Putin with a united international community.*" *Together with the EU, the Prime Minister said, "we are prepared to do even more" in terms of aid to Ukraine and sanctions "aimed at persuading the Russian government to cease hostilities and to sit at the negotiating table with serious, and above all sincere, commitment."* Draghi highlighted "the Italian people's show of solidarity toward their fellow Ukrainians", which is "huge." There are now more than 60,000 refugees, most of them women and children. "Italians have opened the doors of their homes and schools with heartfelt hospitality that is the pride of our country", and we will continue to do so "thanks to the tireless efforts and great professionalism of the Regions, Municipalities, Civil Protection, religious entities and of all the volunteers", since "Italy will not turn its back in the face of incivility". In his speech, Zelensky had remembered that the first Ukrainian child whose mother had fled the war was born in Italy, and that dozens of Ukrainian children are being treated in our hospitals: "We are very grateful to you," the Ukrainian president said, "and we are looking forward to the day

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when they will return to a Ukraine at peace."

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