



**GENERAL DEBATE OF THE SEVENTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY

THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

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(NEW YORK, 20 SEPTEMBER 2020)

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary General,

Honourable delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be here today.

The General Assembly is the place where the world opens up to dialogue and discussion, which are essential elements for peaceful coexistence among countries.

As the 1945 Charter states, the objective of the United Nations is "to maintain international peace and security," "to promote the economic and social progress of all peoples."

Russia's aggression of Ukraine and the various crises that have resulted - food, energy, economic - are putting our collective ideals at risk in a way that has rarely happened since the end of the Cold War.

These crises stand alongside the other great challenges of our time - climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, inequality - and amplify their costs, especially for the weakest.

The responsibilities for the conflict are clear - and one-sided.

But it is our collective responsibility to find answers to these problems with urgency, determination, effectiveness.

We cannot divide ourselves into North and South.

We must act together and rediscover the value of multilateralism that is celebrated here.

The invasion of Ukraine violates the values and rules on which international security and the civil coexistence between countries have rested for decades.

We thought we would no longer have to witness wars of aggression in Europe.

Imperial ambitions, militarism, systematic violations of civil and human rights seemed to belong to the last century.

Since February, however, we have witnessed the bombing of theatres, schools, hospitals;

we have seen terrible attacks and violence on civilians, on children;

we have witnessed the attempt to subjugate a free and sovereign democracy, which has fought back with pride and courage to defend its independence, its dignity.

Helping Ukraine to protect itself was not only the right choice to make.

It was the only choice consistent with the ideals of justice and fraternity that underlie the United Nations Charter and the resolutions that this Assembly has adopted since the beginning of the conflict.

Italy acted without delay, together with the other member countries of the European Union, with its NATO and G7 allies, and with all partners who, like us, believe in a rule-based international system and multilateralism.

Together, we have responded to President Zelensky's request for aid, because a military invasion planned months earlier and carried out on multiple fronts cannot be stopped with words alone.

We imposed unprecedented sanctions on Russia to weaken its military apparatus and to convince President Putin to sit at the negotiating table.

We have welcomed thousands of refugees, assisted those who have remained in Ukraine and are ready to fund the reconstruction of the country - because the horrors of war are best answered with the warmth of solidarity.

Moscow's plan was to conquer Kiev in a few weeks.

Ukrainian soldiers thwarted this attempt and, thanks in part to our military assistance, forced Russia into a longer and more difficult conflict.

In the past few weeks, a heroic counteroffensive has allowed Ukraine to recover thousands of square kilometres of territory, starting with Kharkiv, and has forced the Russian army to retreat.

The outcome of the conflict remains unpredictable, but Kiev appears to have gained an important strategic advantage.

The sanctions we imposed on Moscow have had a disruptive effect on Russia's war machine, on its economy.

Russia struggles to make on its own the armaments it needs, as it finds it difficult to buy the materials required to produce them.

The International Monetary Fund expects the Russian economy to contract this year and the next by about 10 percent in total, compared to 5 percent growth estimated before the war.

The impact of these measures is likely to grow over time, partly because some of them will take effect only in the coming months.

With a weaker economy, it will be more difficult for Russia to respond effectively to the defeats that are piling up on the battlefield.

The unity of the European Union and its allies has been instrumental in providing Ukraine with the support it needs and to impose harsh costs on Russia.

Moscow immediately tried to divide our countries, to use gas as a means of blackmail.

Italy reacted promptly by diversifying gas suppliers and by accelerating the production of renewable energy.

To date, we have halved our dependence from Russian gas and expect to become completely independent in 2024.

On this path, we benefitted from agreements made with many African countries - from Algeria to Angola to the Republic of Congo.

We want to develop green technologies together, to put Africa squarely at the centre of the green transition.

The war in Ukraine has redrawn energy geography and with it, geopolitics.

The European Union is set to look increasingly to the south, and Italy can be a bridge to the southern shore of the Mediterranean, to the African continent.

Social cohesion is essential if we are to maintain a united, resolute position which is consistent with our values.

The rising cost of energy jeopardizes the economic recovery, limits the purchasing power of households, damages the productive capacity of businesses, and can sap our countries' commitment to Ukraine.

In Italy, to help businesses and citizens cope with rising inflation we have spent about 3.5 percent of our gross domestic product.

Now we need to do more, especially at a European level.

As Italy has long argued, the European Union must impose a price cap on gas imports, which will also help us further reduce our payments to Russia.

Europe must support member states while they support Kiev.

The EU must also use the strength of its institutions to shield its neighbours from Russian claims.

The war of aggression in Ukraine has awakened or strengthened the desire for Europe in many countries.

The Italian government has long championed Ukraine's bid for EU membership and strongly supports the integration of the Western Balkans, Moldova, and Georgia into the European Union.

We can only emerge from crises by looking to the future - with courage and ambition.

Our goal is peace.

Such a peace must be deemed acceptable to Ukraine - the only one that can be lasting and sustainable.

So far, Russia has not shown that it wants an end to the conflict: the referenda for independence in the Donbass are a new violation of international law, that we condemn firmly.

Still, Italy wants to be at the forefront of efforts to try and reach an agreement, when this will become possible.

We have managed to do so in the past, when we highlighted how the blockade of Black Sea ports posed a risk to global food security.

The agreement on Ukrainian grain exports marked an important moment of cooperation between parties, for which I want to thank the United Nations, Secretary General Guterres and Turkey.

Our hope is that we will be able to find other ways of cooperating, starting with the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.

Letting a team of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency access the plant was a step forward.

Now it is essential that we arrive at some form of demilitarization of the area.
We cannot risk a nuclear catastrophe.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has produced consequences that go far beyond Europe's borders.

Rising energy prices hit the poor the hardest, exacerbating poverty and inequality.

Rising food prices, scarce availability of grain and other cereals hit the poorest countries the hardest.

Reduced gas supplies have forced some countries to reopen coal-fired power plants or postpone their closure, albeit for a period strictly related to the emergency.

We must respond to this attack on peaceful coexistence with multilateralism, with a spirit of solidarity and responsibility.

We must respond to Russia's war of aggression by reaffirming the principles underlying this assembly: respect for human rights, international cooperation, and non-belligerence.

In his 1988 General Assembly address, Mikhail Gorbachev noted how, in a globalized world, force or the threat of its use could no longer function as an instrument of foreign policy.

"Dealing with global problems," Gorbačëv said, "requires a new 'volume' and a new 'quality' of cooperation" on the part of states.

Our reaction to the war in Ukraine serves to reaffirm that gratuitous violence should have no place in the 21st century.

Italy hopes there can be a future in which Russia returns to the principles it chose to subscribe to in 1945.

A world divided into blocs, characterized by rigid ideological demarcations and military confrontations cannot generate development, cannot solve problems.

We must maintain our individual identities, but conduct international relations responsibly, legally, peacefully.

This principle must apply to all the crises we face: from Ukraine, to the recent clashes in the Caucasus, to instability in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, to tensions in the Indo-Pacific.

Despite the divisions in recent months, we have a solid foundation on which to build.

Italy's presidency of the G20 last year coincided with a moment of great cooperation between countries.

It is a legacy that we must not dissipate – and I want to recall Rome's readiness to host EXPO 2030, to continue to offer shared solutions to global problems.

At the most acute stage of the pandemic, we took action to overcome protectionism in sanitary products and ensure more vaccines for the world's poorest regions.

Through the COVAX mechanism we distributed more than 1.4 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines to the countries that needed them the most.

We enhanced financial assistance to vulnerable states to help them respond to the economic consequences of the pandemic and we promoted the extension of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative.

Through a newfound spirit of cooperation, we intensified the fight against climate change.

For the first time, all G20 member states pledged to try to keep global warming within 1.5 degrees of pre-industrial levels and accepted the scientific facts behind this goal.

We also agreed on a set of short- and medium-term responses to achieve this goal – and the commitments which we made at COP26 in Glasgow followed shortly thereafter.

During the G20, we set out new financial contributions to help low-income countries transition to a more sustainable economy.

We must continue to support the most vulnerable states to help them defend themselves against the impacts of climate change and to pursue their own transition paths.

I am thinking, for example, of the tragic flooding in Pakistan, where a very large part of the country is underwater and millions of people have been forced to leave their homes.

The environmental crisis affects us all, and we must come out of it together.

Italy's commitment to peace, to international solidarity is unceasing.

We are the largest contributor of Blue Helmets among European countries, and our military is deployed in five missions in the Mediterranean, Africa and Asia.

In Lebanon, we participate in the UNIFIL mission with the second largest contingent.

We are very active in promoting dialogue with all countries in the wider Mediterranean.

In Libya, we are committed to ensuring that the difficult process of national reconciliation receives strong support from the international community.

On this journey, the United Nations remains our main point of reference.

I also want to thank UN institutions for the valuable humanitarian aid they give in the management of migration in the Mediterranean.

Italy is well aware that migration is a global phenomenon, and must be addressed as such.

We must have a responsible, humane and shared approach.

The war in Ukraine and the resulting crises have strained the cohesion of the international community.

But it is precisely in this context that we need to rediscover the spirit of cooperation that has enabled us in past years to face similar challenges together.

Our common institutions must renew themselves.

Italy strongly supports the need to reform the UN Security Council, to make it more representative, efficient, transparent.

In the coming years, Italy will continue to be a protagonist in the EU, close to its NATO allies, ready to listen and open to dialogue, determined to contribute to international peace and security.

These are the same principles and goals that inspire the United Nations and that, today, we must defend today

Thank you.