



UN Condemns Russia's Annexation of Ukrainian Regions

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On 10-12 October, another meeting of the 11th emergency special session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) was held, this time on the illegal annexation of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions by the Russian Federation. By an overwhelming majority, the UNGA condemned the act, declaring it a violation of international law. The adopted resolution called on all UN member states and international organisations not to recognise Russia's annexation acts and on Russia to withdraw from Ukraine and end its aggression.

What is an emergency special session of the UNGA?

The UN General Assembly holds regular annual sessions and special sessions as needed. According to the UN Charter, the Security Council (UNSC) may request the UNGA to hold an emergency special session in the event of a threat to the peace or an act of aggression if a decision has not been taken due to the lack of unanimity of the permanent members of the UNSC. [The current—eleventh—session was convened precisely at the request of the UNSC on 28 February 2022 after Russia was outvoted on a procedural issue on which it does not have a veto.](#) The request pertains to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, under the United for Peace procedure. The resolution adopted on 2 March this year reserved the possibility of resuming the emergency special session at the request of UN member states. After Russia held pseudo-referendums in the occupied territories in September this year, the UNSC was unable to take a decision, again as a result of a Russian veto. Therefore, at the request of Albania, which currently sits on the UNSC, and Ukraine, UNGA President Csaba Kőrösi resumed the extraordinary session.

What was the outcome of the vote?

On 10 October, after the resumption of the extraordinary session, Russian diplomacy attempted to make the UNGA vote secret. Albania objected, so this procedure was subject to a vote in which the Russian proposal failed, with 107 states against secrecy and only 13 supporting it. The

UNGA considered that a secret vote on peace and security would set a "dangerous precedent". During the debate, in addition to the issue of Ukraine's territorial integrity, condemnation of recent Russian missile attacks on civilian targets resonated strongly. In the end, the UNGA resolution was adopted in an open vote on 12 October. As many as 143 member states condemned the annexation, and only five voted against—Belarus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), Nicaragua, Russia and Syria—and 35 abstained, including China and India. This indicates the continuing opposition of the international community to the Russian actions. The resolution of 2 March 2022 condemning the Russian armed aggression against Ukraine was adopted by a majority of 141 votes, 5 against, and 35 abstentions (again including China and India). [It is worth recalling that the 2014 resolution on the refusal to recognise the annexation of Crimea was supported by only 100 states with 11 against and as many as 82 abstentions or non-votes.](#)

What does the adopted UNGA resolution contain?

Adopted on 12 October, UNGA Resolution A/RES-11/5, entitled "Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the UN Charter", reaffirms the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. [It strongly condemns the holding of "illegal so-called referenda" by the Russian Federation in Ukrainian regions.](#) The UNGA stresses in the resolution that Russian actions to incorporate the occupied

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territories into Russia are invalid under international law and do not constitute grounds for any change in their status. The resolution also calls on all member states, the UN as a body, and other international organisations not to recognise any territorial claims by Russia against the occupied regions of Ukraine. The resolution also expressed strong support for the continued efforts of the Secretary-General and member states to de-escalate the current situation “in search of peace through dialogue, negotiation and mediation”. At the same time, the UNGA demanded the immediate withdrawal of Russia’s unlawful declarations of annexation and reiterated that the use of armed force against a sovereign state is a violation of the principles of the UN Charter and international law.

What will be the impact of the UN vote?

UNGA resolutions are not acts of international law. However, this does not mean that their content does not reflect international legal norms legally binding through

other sources. The outcome of the vote indicates that the vast majority of the international community considers Russia to be an aggressor and a state responsible for blatant violations of international law and the principles of the UN Charter. It also sends a very clear signal that these states affirm the fundamental principle of respect for territorial integrity. The repeated abstentions of China and India may indicate that they are putting their economic and political interests above their willingness to defend an international order based on law. Especially in the case of India, this should be a warning sign in its relations with the U.S. and the EU. The outcome of the vote demonstrates the prevalence of the perception of Ukraine as a state fighting against illegal aggression and thus strengthens its position in calls for increased military aid, especially in terms of air defence. The UNSC’s chronic inability to adopt decisions may lead to the growing importance of the UNGA as a body whose voice means more and more in matters of global peace and security.