

Hawkish language was heard at a hearing organised by the centre-right EPP political group in the European Parliament on Tuesday 21st April, with lawmakers arguing that the best deterrence was to be ready for war.

MEP Tunne Kelam, who chaired the meeting, said that Russia had become the EU's adversary and that its next target would be the Baltic states. When this happens, the West's credibility would be put to the test, he warned.

Kelam appeared to echo remarks from Estonian President Toomas Ilves, who recently said that the lack of commitment from NATO to defend his country could mean the death of the alliance.

As Romanian MEP Cristian Dan Preda remarked, a majority of Romanians believe Putin will not stop until he unites Russia with Transnistria, in Moldova, via the southern territories of Ukraine. Dan Preda is political coordinator for the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the EPP group.

Roland Freudenstein, Deputy Director and Head of Research of the Martens Centre, the EPP think tank, went even further, saying that Putin wanted to destroy, at least morally and politically, the two decisive euro-Atlantic institutions, the EU and NATO.

Such hawkish language from the European People's Party (EPP) is significant because of the party's deep roots within Europe's corridors of power. The EPP is the largest political group in the European Parliament, and the party behind the nomination of Jean-Claude Juncker as President of the European Commission. It has the support of some of Europe's most powerful leaders, including Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor.

Renaissance of the West

Freudenstein, who recently co-authored a booklet published by the Martens Centre, The Renaissance of the West, regretted that with all of the awareness of the new Russian threat, Europe's readiness to go to war had not been properly discussed in public.

"That needs to change [...] We have to make clear that yes, we are willing to go to war, for what we consider existential principles of Europe's future," he said.

Freudenstein further argued that the West should resume its deterrence, adding that the concept included nuclear deterrence.

"In Germany at the moment, nuclear deterrence by NATO consists of 20 rusting free-fall bombs, of the B-61 type, that can be wiped out with one strike of the Russian forces. These are things where we have to change, we have to shape up," he said, admitting that those were at the same time issues extremely difficult to be sold publically.

According to Freudenstein, Western leaders should tell the Russians "Yes we hear you, we understand what you are saying, we just believe it's completely wrong."

Russian diplomacy parodied

Illustrating his point, Freudenstein cited an international conference held three years ago, where several speakers criticised Russia's aggressive stance towards Georgia. Moscow and Tbilisi waged a brief war in August 2008.

Displaying unexpected theatrical skills, Freudenstein mimicked Russia's envoy to the EU, Vladimir Chizhov, whom he parodied with a heavy Russian accent, saying, "Please, my friends, we have so much in common, we were together. Remember our common past." A Georgian speaker, whom he imitated with perfect English, reportedly responded: "We do, Mr Ambassador, we do, every day."

For Freudenstein, "What was striking was that Mr Chizhov could not even comprehend that someone, a non-Russian, would think that there was anything terrible about this common past [under the Soviet Union]. That's the thing that we have to try to make clear to them. I don't know whether we will succeed but we have to."

In a stark warning to Europe's doves, Freudenstein said those who still expected a return to "business as usual" with Russia were deluded. He repeated an idea from his booklet The Renaissance of the West, that the conflict with Russia will be over only when Vladimir Putin "leaves the Kremlin in whatever shape."

"This is a zero-sum game," Freudenstein warned, announcing that

the Martens Centre had prepared another publication, on how to respond to Russian propaganda, bearing the title, Muzzling the Bear.

Hawks

MEP Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, a Polish MEP who is a vice chair of the EPP group, joked that with "so many hawks" in the session, he did not need to speak.

The remaining "hawks" included MEP Elmar Brok (CDU, Germany), the chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, MEP Sandra Kalniete (Latvia), Vice-Chair of the EPP Group, responsible for Neighbourhood Policy, and MEP Gabrielius Landsbergis (Lithuania), rapporteur of the European Parliament on the State of EU-Russia relations, among others.

Saryusz-Wolski argued that Central and Eastern European EU countries had long ago warned about the real intentions of Putin, but those warnings had been rejected by Western partners as anti-Russian. "Those who were wrong should acknowledge it," he said.

He also argued that Russia was not only about Putin, but was the country of people like Boris Nemtsov, Andrei Sakharov, and Anna Politkovskaya.

"Our best way to influence the Russian society is to show that there is a different life possible also in the post-Soviet sphere. If we win with Ukraine, we will win one day with Russia. If we fail with Ukraine, Putin will win," he said.

Message to EU leaders

"Time of talk and persuasion [vis-à-vis Russia] is over. Now it's time for tough policy, realistic policy, and concentration on defence and security, because the eastern flank of the EU feels vitally, existentially threatened," he said, and added, apparently as a message to EU leaders who will hold an extraordinary summit tomorrow:

"And a final word to those absent in this room. The southern flank of the Union will not enjoy (the) understanding of (the) EU's eastern flank on immigration, which is the subject of the special summit, if it continues not to understand, or to refuse to understand, the eastern existential threats."