



By: *The Editorial Board*

Blockade of US aid to Ukraine - a dangerous precedent and a crack in the allied bloc



After the US Congress was forced to accept a temporary budget that did not include regular help to Kyiv, "soon" was the only word of consolation the White House could give Kyiv.

The government's compromise with the Republican majority in the House of Representatives, which unblocked federal government funding, included a temporary halt in financial support to Ukraine.

The Ukrainian defence against Russian aggression possibly faces its biggest predicament since this decision of the US Congress.

Conservative Republican representatives will claim all the credit if the Russian army's forces prevail on the front if the promise of "soon" on the continuation of US financial help to Ukraine is kept.

They have already set a significant negative precedent in the more or less smooth US financing of Ukraine, by far the largest within the coalition of allies, with their pressure on the US government to reduce costs and fulfil its obligations.

Relief tank running low

President Biden confirmed that the situation was dramatic. His administration has made a coordinated effort to convey positive messages regarding the continuation of support for Kyiv. He spoke with numerous coalition leaders who supported Ukrainian defence shortly after Congress' decision.

"The leaders discussed efforts to continue strengthening Ukraine air defences as they prepare for more attacks on critical infrastructure", said John Kirby, NSC spokesperson, after President Biden's conversation with coalition leaders, including UK PM Rishi Sunak, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Japanese PM Fumio Kishida, Italian PM Giorgia Meloni and the EU leaders.

Until some new decision on continuing aid to Ukraine, the Pentagon has about \$5.5 billion

available to send weapons to Kyiv from previously approved aid packages.

Will the White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre's reference to "soon" be accurate given that John Kirby, her NSC colleague, stated that US funding to Ukraine would "run out in a couple of months"

This will happen if the Congress, that is, the Republican hardliners in the House of Representatives, persist in blocking aid to Ukraine.

Perhaps they will "soften up" after the removal of Kevin McCarthy as the Speaker of the House of Representatives last Tuesday because, in their understanding of political responsibility, it was an incomparably more significant job than the continuation of US support for Ukraine.

But after the issue culminated in Congress, the democratic minority in the House is heading to insist on unfreezing aid to Ukraine as quickly as possible despite the crisis in the legislation.

Joe Biden's leadership tested

President Joe Biden has made the support of Ukraine and the collapse of Russian aggression a priority of the current and future mandate for which he will fight next year.

The political turbulence in Congress is putting his leadership to the test because he lacks time to restore the previously stable support for Kyiv.

European partners responded to news of the temporary suspension of American support for Ukraine in a dramatic manner because they were concerned that this precedent could have an unfavourable domino effect in their own backyard.

They wanted to demonstrate unity and support for Ukraine when they held a meeting of the heads of diplomacy of the 27-member bloc in Kyiv at the beginning of the week, for

the first time outside EU territory.

Following the meeting with the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, came assurances that the EU will continue its support. The EU announced an extraordinary €5 billion in aid to the Ukrainian army.

This is good first aid to cushion the bad news from Washington, but not more than that.

Resistance in the EU will increase

With regard to overcoming internal opposition to provide significant aid for Ukrainian defence against Russian aggression, the EU may have a harder job than the US. The biggest worry among European leaders is that the precedent set by the United States would only fuel the opposition to sending billions of dollars to Kyiv within the EU.

In each of the 27 EU member states, there is a weaker or stronger opposition to solidarity with Ukraine, which most often refers to the fact that EU economies have suffered significant blows and that there is no room for "wasting" money and weapons from storage.

In one member state, Slovakia, since last Saturday, pro-Russian leader Robert Fico, who based his entire campaign on denying aid to neighbouring Ukraine, has the best chance of forming a new government.

If he becomes prime minister, Fico will join his Hungarian ideological role model, Viktor Orbán, in resisting European solidarity with Kyiv.

The Union will thus find it even more difficult to reach a consensus on the financial packages intended for Kyiv, just as Orbán demonstrated last December, blocking the decision to send €18 billion to Ukraine.

America's negative precedent will no doubt strengthen those forces across Europe who put their own economic and security interests

ahead of helping Ukraine, and ignore the still-dominant belief that it is actually self-help for Europe from Russia's aggression.

Crack in US leadership

US aid to Ukraine of about \$75 billion (Kiel Institute for the World Economy) is by far the largest in the bloc of allies: 5 times larger than the following 2 contributors Germany and the UK.

However, its worth has increased even more by the leadership example it provides, adopted by all partners.

Following the congressional precedent of excluding the new aid package to Ukraine, a big crack has been created in the US leadership, and with time, it will become even bigger.

"Even if Members of Congress or their constituents do not care about morality in international politics or ethics in US foreign policy - because, after all, it is a brutish and nasty world out there - there are many realpolitik arguments for continued aid to Ukraine", said Michael McFaul, professor at Stanford University and former US ambassador to Russia.

Whether Ukraine will be able to defend itself this autumn and winter depends on how long the "soon" promised by the White House for the continuation of aid will last.

Let us not forget that Russia already doubled its military budget last August. There is no doubt that there were no issues in the parliament.