



European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



Laudation by President von der Leyen for Japanese Prime Minister Kishida at the 2023 Atlantic Council Awards

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Good evening,

It is a pleasure, and an honour, to be here tonight and speak at this esteemed gathering – about an ally and a friend, and a most deserving recipient of this award: Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. I could tell the audience about our amazing cooperation of these years, dear Prime Minister; about how we coordinated our actions in the wake and in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale aggression of Ukraine; or how you hosted an incredibly successful G7 in Hiroshima.

But there is another moment that is even more telling of your courage and leadership. I am talking about your visit to the small Ukrainian town of Bucha. A symbol of Russia's brutality and of Ukraine's resistance. Bucha was liberated by Ukraine's brave soldiers in the early weeks of the war. But Russian troops left a trail of death and destruction. They executed dozens of civilians in cold blood – in one of the worst war crimes since the start of Russia's brutal war.

And you, dear Fumio, decided to make the long and difficult trip to Bucha to see with your own eyes the horror that Russia left behind, but also Ukraine's determinations to resist and to fight for its freedom. For the first time since World War II, a Japanese Prime Minister visited a country at war. And you brought with you Japan's solidarity, in words and deeds. From the very beginning of this war, you opened your country to Ukrainian refugees. You joined us in sanctioning Russia for its crimes. And you stood at our side when Putin tried to blackmail Europe with gas. Ukraine and the whole of Europe will be forever grateful to you for this. *Arigato*, dear Fumio.

You have done this because you know that, although Ukrainians are paying the highest price, this war is not only about Ukraine, and it is not only about European security. This is about the basic principles of the UN Charter, which have protected global peace since the end of World War II. It is about the simple yet vital rule that borders cannot be changed by force and that every country should be free to chart its own path. You, dear Fumio, understood this from day one. You understood that we must all contribute to upholding the UN Charter. Because in a lawless world, any country might face the same fate as Ukraine. In your words: 'Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow.'

European security and Indo-Pacific security are one and the same. Your vision of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' is also our vision. So, we are bound to work together. And in these two years, Prime Minister, you have forged ever-stronger ties between Japan and your like-minded friends, near and far – from East Asia to Europe and North America. You have reconnected Japan to its most trusted partners and built new bridges across the world. Thanks to your leadership, today our three continents are closer than ever before.

Distinguished guests,

There is a Japanese proverb that tells a lot about the country and about its Prime Minister. It says: '*Onko-chishin*'. And it means: 'Explore the past, to learn new things.' You, dear Prime Minister, showed me the meaning of this proverb during the G7 Summit in Japan last year. You brought us to your hometown of Hiroshima. The place where you have your roots, and which has deeply shaped your life and leadership. **Many of your relatives lost their life when the atomic bomb razed Hiroshima to the ground.** You have grown up with the stories of survivors. And you wanted us to listen to the same stories, to face the past and learn something about the future. It was a sobering start to the G7 and one that I will not forget, **especially at a time when Russia threatens to use nuclear weapons once again.** It is heinous, it is dangerous – and in the shadow of Hiroshima, it is unforgivable. No one is better poised than Japan to warn us of the extreme danger of this recklessness. Right from the beginning of this war, Japan's position was clear. As the only country that has suffered from atomic bombings, you have made the whole world listen.

Today, Russia's nuclear saber rattling has been condemned not only by our like-minded partners in the G7, but by the whole world. And your diplomatic efforts have been crucial to reach this outcome.

be with you today to celebrate your work and your vision.

Distinguished guests,

Please join me in congratulating Prime Minister Kishida on earning the 2023 Atlantic Council Award.

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Press contacts:

[Eric MAMER](#) (+32 2 299 40 73)

[Dana SPINANT](#) (+32 2 299 01 50)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)

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