**Slava Ukraine**

Ukrainians, I hope realise, despite pleas from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, that a no-fly zone is impossible.

However, the West is helping with humanitarian aid and has provided military support. Last week, Ben Wallace, Secretary of State for Defence, announced that Britain had given the Ukrainians 3,615 NLAW short-range anti –tank weapons, which have been credited with stalling the advance of the Russian armoured columns.

In Trafalgar Square and on College Green I spoke to tearful Ukrainians who dreaded calling family, with no idea what to do if the phone wasn’t answered. One man’s family hadn’t left Ukraine, as there was a 25km queue to the border and they felt safer in the city rather than risk being bombed en route to Poland.

But the no-fly zone was uppermost in the minds of many anxious Ukrainians I spoke to. They entreated me to talk to politicians, but I could only say that as Ukraine isn’t a member of NATO there is no chance of a no-fly zone. Even so, I was thanked profusely for my support, as there were few Brits at the rally and – much to my embarrassment – was told how grateful they were that I had come along.

British people have responded with tremendous generosity to appeals for Ukraine, with the Disasters Emergency Committee raising £400m in just four days – and rising after Putin’s horrifying attacks on schools, homes and hospitals.

Many have agreed to host Ukrainian families, including Sir Keir Starmer and Benedict Cumberbatch. The government has now offered £350 to homeowners who will take Ukrainians into their home for six months and has announced that £10,000 per person will be available through local councils.

The Polish White Eagle Club in Balham is collecting clothes, candles, medical supplies and batteries, which will be driven by volunteers to the Polish border. The queue to drop off parcels stretched down Balham High Street and when I eventually got into the club it was difficult to find space to leave bags.

I saw the play of Dogs of Europe, which is based on a novel by Alhierd Bacharevic, now banned in Belarus. This is an epic fantasy and political thriller about the dangers of looking away when authoritarianism takes root.

Exiled from their native country, the co-founders of the Belarus Free Theatre are political refugees with a cast that plays to courageous audiences in secret locations across Minsk and around the world.

Having lived in a democracy and a dictatorship, this show is especially prescient. At the end of the play, which was on at the Barbican, after several standing ovations, the director spoke about the cast who are political exiles from Belarus and the need for solidarity with Ukraine. Unlike the protesters on College Green, she wasn’t asking for a no-fly zone but stressed the threat, not just to Ukraine and Belarus, but to the whole world. A very moving address ended in the audience showing photographs of political prisoners for social media.

We can only hope that the latest talks between Russia and Ukraine make progress. On Sunday Russia bombed a military base used by western volunteers less than 15 miles from the Polish border, which brings the war close to the frontiers of the EU and Nato. If talks fail thousands of Ukrainians civilians and cities will continue to be bombed and Russia could take Kyiv any day.

Without an agreement the threat is moving that much closer.

**Jenny Nicholson
Honorary Representative
Conservative Foreign and Commonwealth Council**