

# The Ukrainian Left's View on the Prospects of Peace Negotiations

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Recently, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy declared that negotiations on the war's ending could only be public. To this, Putin's press secretary could only mumble that he could not even imagine such a thing because, in his opinion, public negotiations do not exist at all. It is a precious recognition that negotiations in the understanding of the current Russian government can only take place as a continuation of accumulating multi-layered lies, which appears to be the foundation of the public communication strategy of the Putin regime.

A prime example of this activity was the multi-year production of many implausible but impressive conspiracy versions of the murder of 298 people during the crash of flight MH17 in the sky over Ukraine on July 17, 2014. Based on the open trial results, the Dutch court has established that the crime was committed with the Buk anti-aircraft system, which the Russians illegally brought to Ukraine. But, of course, Russian officials have already rejected this court decision. Russian propagandists are preparing to confuse the issue and provide an opportunity for self-justification to those who wish to remain deceived.

[Zelenskyy said that he wants the conversation about those solutions to be public rather than take place behind closed doors.]

## What does Putin's regime actually offer?

The war very convincingly opened the eyes of Ukrainians to what is the modern Russian state and destroyed any trust in it. All wars, of course, end with negotiations. Ukraine has always clearly emphasized that it has no intention of reaching Moscow and demanding full and unconditional surrender. Moreover, the voluntary withdrawal of Russian troops will preserve the lives of the Ukrainian military and civilian population. Is it possible that this is precisely what Putin wants to

discuss? Then why not communicate it publicly?

Most likely, the Russian authorities are again trying to come up with another combination of lies and manipulations to buy time and calm down the country's apolitical population, stirred up by partial mobilization. But, despite this, one could speculate that some compromises could favor Ukraine under certain circumstances. But any compromises are possible only if there are reasons to believe the agreement will be fulfilled. There is no trust in the ruling elites of the Russian Federation. The same people have already signed such pacts, including the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. Even during the last year, they made promises that were quickly broken: in February, Putin promised that there would be no invasion of Ukraine. In September, he stated there would be no mobilization in the Russian Federation. Recently Putin promised that "Russia is in Kherson forever." Only in the last case, Putin's lies can be justified by circumstances independent of his will in the form of Ukrainian armed forces.



In the picture, you can see the answers to the question: "In general, are affairs in Ukraine going in the right or wrong direction?" (According to "Rating" group data).

### **What do Ukrainians want?**

Currently, Ukrainians trust their state. You can look at the results of a sociological group "Rating" survey, according to which, during a full-scale war, the share of people who believe the country is moving in the right direction increased to 70-80% from the usual 10-20% over the last decade. This result was higher than 30% only during Euromaidan and for a short time after Zelenskyy was elected when his efforts to achieve a stable end to the war in Donbas seemed successful. Currently, there is a consensus in Ukrainian society that to achieve peace, it is necessary to expel the Russian army from the country (by destroying their army if possible), to "demilitarize" the Russian Federation, at least to the point where it can no longer shell peaceful Ukrainian cities and blackmail us with deprivation from electricity, water, and heating. This is what Ukrainians see as a movement in the right direction. Everything else is perceived as a deviation from the course.

At the same time, according to the Kyiv Institute of Sociology, the percentage of people who believe that Ukraine can agree to some territorial concessions to achieve peace has decreased from 10% to 7% over the past five months. According to the latest available data, 87% of the population does not want to make any territorial concessions to the Russian Federation. The crucial point is the overwhelming majority of respondents in all regions of Ukraine, including the West, East, and South, reject the possibility of territorial concessions to achieve peace. Moreover, representatives of all major ethnic and linguistic groups are similarly inclined. Even among Ukrainian citizens who identify as "Russian-speaking Russians," 57% oppose territorial concessions to the Putin regime. The beginning of the widespread missile attacks on power plants and the associated blackouts appear to only contribute to strengthening the opinion among Ukrainians that negotiations with the Russians are still pointless. While sociological polls during the war can be inaccurate, they adequately demonstrate the main trends of public opinion changes.

### **When will Ukrainians agree to negotiations?**

People in the USA, European countries, and the rest of the world who want the beginning of peace negotiations should at least achieve an immediate end to the destruction of Ukrainian critical infrastructure by Russian missiles and the restoration of regular electricity and heat supply to the population. This requires introducing stricter sanctions against Russia, which will reduce its ability to produce such missiles, as well as providing Ukraine with more effective air and missile defense

systems, reducing the effectiveness of Russian attacks.

It would be worthwhile to convince the governments of the world to stop buying Russian oil and gas, to provide anti-missile defense systems and at least a couple of thousand industrial-grade electricity transformers to restore regular electricity, water, and heat supply (preferably with the repair crews for their installation) instead of wasting time talking about how the world needs to convince Zelenskyy of something. Only if this is done can we at least hypothetically expect that the interest of Ukrainians in peace negotiations will increase.

Zelenskyy and his party may have many shortcomings, but it is clear that they depend on and very closely monitor public opinion. So, no matter what happens, the Ukrainian authorities can only agree to such negotiations and peace, which a convincing majority of the Ukrainian people will accept.

It is necessary to convince the majority of Ukrainians that the negotiations could make sense to convince Zelenskyy to start peace negotiations with the Russians. The best way to do this is to publicly offer at least some clear proposals for such negotiations. Is Russia ready to immediately cancel the decision to annex Ukrainian territories? Do they want to discuss the withdrawal of troops? If not, it will be challenging to explain to the Ukrainians what else can be negotiated except for prisoner of war exchanges (which already happens regularly).

If peace talks are possible, they have a chance of public support only if they are held in public. It cannot be ruled out that if the Russians publicly offered to discuss a peace plan that would include the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine and the prospects of restoring the country's territorial integrity, the Ukrainians might agree to such negotiations. But no proposals that include the withdrawal of Russian troops have been announced at the moment. De facto, Russians "offer negotiations" only to delay the Ukrainian counteroffensive until they can rebuild their forces, so it's unclear what should instigate Ukrainians' interest.

So far, only warlike rhetoric and promises to "achieve the goals of the special operation" at any cost are heard publicly from the leadership of the Russian Federation. The last thing we heard from the Deputy Head of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, D. Medvedev, was a territorial claim to the "Russian city of Kiev." At the same time, he called Kyiv citizens who disagreed with his claim "cockroaches" (which suggests associations with the rhetoric of the organizers of the genocide in Rwanda<sup>2</sup>).

[<sup>2</sup> The ideology of the genocide of Ukrainians, which is being actively formed and institutionalized in the Russian Federation as a state ideology, as well as the rapid decline into fascism of the country in general, of course, deserve a separate article]

### **Why are there no peace negotiations now?**

To conclude, the responsibility for the fact that peace negotiations are not currently underway lies entirely with the Russian Federation, which does not provide, at least publicly, any proposals that the majority of Ukrainians could even hypothetically accept. Ukraine did put forward such proposals. Before the massive attacks on Ukrainian civilian infrastructure, Ukraine had publicly announced proposals to the Istanbul meeting on March 29, which included the withdrawal of Russian troops to the line on February 23 and the postponement of discussion about Crimea and Donbas. At the same time, the Ukrainian side insisted that all disputes should be resolved through transparent referendums held under the supervision of international observers and after the return of all forcibly displaced persons.

The public response of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Serhii Lavrov, was

that Ukraine's "neutral status" is "conceptually suitable" for them and, at the same time, not a word was said regarding the readiness to withdraw troops. It seems that the Kremlin does not consider referendums that are difficult to falsify as an option for a possible solution. They still do not perceive Ukrainians as the entity that will make the final decision. It simply does not fit in their heads. This is the main problem of the prospect of peace negotiations. There is no certainty that it makes sense to conduct them with the current Russian leadership. There is no certainty that the Russian authorities even understand that Zelenskyy cannot simply sign whatever he wants and that even Biden cannot force Zelenskyy to sign an agreement that the majority of Ukrainians will not approve.

In October-November, some mediating countries put forward proposals for the possible conclusion of peace on the conditions of withdrawing Russian troops from the South and East of Ukraine, including Donbas, but postponing the question of the status of Crimea for seven years. In the case of Moscow's interest, it was offered to stop missile strikes on Ukraine's critical infrastructure to prove the seriousness of its intentions. Russia responded with a massive missile strike during the G20 summit.

After Zelenskyy put forward a possible agenda for negotiations in the form of 10 points in his speech at the G20 summit (and even more so after he announced the demand for public negotiations), any statements by Russian diplomats about the desire for negotiations, not supported by public proposals, can be clearly qualified as lies and manipulation.

Ukrainians want peace, but not another "ceasefire" that will last until the next invasion. Campaigning for peace is actually being conducted even in mainstream Ukrainian media, but trust in peace negotiations and lasting peace are impossible without public discussion of its terms. In particular, the editor-in-chief of "Ukrainian Pravda" Sevgil Musaeva, a Ukrainian of Crimean-Tatar origin, does not reject negotiations. Even though the postponement of the Crimea decision is a personal matter for her, she calls for the public formulation of fair peace terms because if "Ukrainian society does not feel justice, any agreements are doomed from the beginning."

We, Ukrainian socialists, must now watch closely so that no one forgets that peace negotiations must be public and only public, only on terms acceptable to Ukrainians. Only in this way can we count on a just and lasting peace.

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