

Ukraine and Russia: Towards a Negotiated End to the War

This broadly supported initiative outlines a viable roadmap toward a ceasefire and eventual peace treaty in Ukraine, offering an alternative to both capitulation and escalation.

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Europe's future will be determined by reason, constructive cooperation, and the equal rights of all nations. A lasting peace cannot emerge from capitulation or from territorial questions left unresolved and a just and sustainable settlement begins with the manner in which the transition to peace negotiations is conceived and conducted.

Therefore, this proposal aims to

- point out possible solutions to the most important problems which, given a corresponding willingness to compromise by the parties to the conflict, would be suitable to end the war;
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- secure the continued existence of Ukraine as a sovereign, independent and functional European state and, after four years of a cruel war, give the people there renewed hope for a future;
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- lay the foundation for a pan-European security and peace order, taking into account the security interests of both Russia and Ukraine.

With this proposal, we aim to help establish a credible foundation for launching peace negotiations. A ceasefire becomes realistically attainable only when the warring parties have first agreed—through negotiations—on binding rules governing its implementation. By contrast, a simple pause in hostilities without clear, enforceable commitments remains inherently unstable: even minor incidents can trigger renewed fighting, deepen mutual mistrust, and thereby make the start of substantive peace talks even more difficult.

It is encouraging that France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other European states have chosen to engage actively in President Trump's initiative to develop a negotiation framework for launching peace talks. A just and durable peace is, after all, a fundamental security interest for

¹ <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik-gesellschaft/geopolitik/ukraine-krieg-verhandlungsfrieden-plan-gerechter-frieden-europa-li.10012558>

all Europeans. Should these peace efforts falter, the risk of the conflict widening into a broader European war — and with it the danger of nuclear escalation — would grow significantly.

The opening of peace negotiations must no longer be obstructed by maximalist positions. All parties will inevitably face difficult compromises. Recent years have shown that the cost of refusing to negotiate is higher than the cost of a balanced settlement. For this reason, the start of negotiations must not be delayed or jeopardized. A military collapse of Ukraine, or an unregulated ceasefire without a political framework, would not enhance European security; it would undermine it.

Only a peace settlement that reflects the core interests of both Ukraine and Russia, and is acceptable to the United States as well as Europe, can lay the foundation for a just and lasting pan-European security and peace architecture. Europeans, in a spirit of strategic responsibility, should assume stewardship for peace and freedom on our continent — for a predictable Europe and for an international order that contains conflicts rather than inflames them.

A. General Provisions

1. The parties to the conflict reaffirm their determination to conduct the negotiations with the firm intention of ending the war and striving for a lasting, peaceful settlement of all disputed issues.

2. The parties to the conflict

- no longer regard each other as adversaries and commit themselves to returning to the principles of equal and indivisible security,
- commit themselves to refraining from the threat and use of force,
- commit themselves not to undertake any war-preparatory measures vis-à-vis the contracting party,
- commit themselves to transparency in their military planning and exercises as well as to greater predictability of their military and political actions,
- accept a demilitarized zone with a width of 60 kilometres, formed by the median course of the front line,
- accept that the demilitarized zone is monitored by a UN peacekeeping force under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, in which armed forces of NATO member states do not participate,
- commit themselves to resolving all disputes without the use of force through mediation by the guarantor states or, where this is required, by the Security Council of the United Nations (cf. III.2).

B. Starting Point for Peace Negotiations

I. The Territorial Question

To resolve the disputed territorial question, both parties must be prepared to accept a difficult but necessary compromise. In our proposal of 30 August 2023 for ending the war through a negotiated settlement, we suggested a referendum should bilateral talks on the territorial issue fail. Given subsequent political developments and the current military situation, that proposal is no longer viable.

A possible way forward arises from the fact that the regions of Luhansk and Donetsk declared themselves independent people's republics in April 2014 (Luhansk People's Republic, LPR; and Donetsk People's Republic, DPR). Russia recognized these entities as "independent states" on

21 February 2022, and on 30 September 2022 incorporated all four eastern regions into the Russian Federation.

1. The situation in Zaporizhzhia and Kherson shall be frozen along the current line of contact. The territories presently controlled by Russian armed forces shall, for the time being, remain de facto under Russian administration.
2. Russia shall reaffirm its recognition of the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, as declared on 21 February 2022, as “independent states.”
3. Ukraine shall recognize the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk. In return, Russia shall relinquish parts of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions it now occupies. The precise delineation of these areas shall be determined by the contracting parties.
4. Russia and Ukraine shall withdraw all armed forces from the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk within 30 days of the initialling of the bilateral agreement. The withdrawal shall be monitored by a United Nations peacekeeping mission.
5. Both regions shall be placed under UN trusteeship with the mandate to guide them toward self-determination under international supervision.
6. Within 100 days of the initialling of the agreement, Ukraine shall hold a nationwide referendum in accordance with Article 73 of its Constitution, in which the Ukrainian electorate votes on the secession of the two regions. The referendum shall take place under international observation by the OSCE. Eligible voters shall include all Ukrainian citizens who had permanent residence in Ukraine as of 31 December 2021 and who return to their place of residence by the day of the referendum.
7. Russia and Ukraine shall commit to recognizing the outcome of the referendum and incorporating it without delay into their respective national legislation.

II. NATO Membership of Ukraine

Immediately after the outbreak of the war, the Ukrainian President publicly stated that NATO was not prepared to admit Ukraine. He signalled his readiness to discuss neutrality, a position subsequently reflected in the Communiqué produced during the Istanbul negotiations of 15 April 2022 (“Treaty on Permanent Neutrality and Security Guarantees for Ukraine”). In September 2022, however, President Zelenskyy renewed his call for NATO membership and submitted a formal application for accelerated accession.

Shortly before the final round of consultations with European heads of state and government and American negotiators on 15 December 2025, Zelenskyy again noted that, since the United States and several European countries had rejected Ukraine’s push for NATO membership, he expected the West to provide his country with comprehensive security guarantees comparable to those enjoyed by alliance members. This should be understood as a negotiating proposal that could open the way toward resolving this issue.

1. Ukraine reaffirms its “solemnly declared intention to become a permanently neutral state that does not participate in military alliances and adheres to the three non-nuclear principles: not to accept, manufacture or acquire nuclear weapons,” as stated in the Declaration of State Sovereignty of 16 July 1990. These foundations of the future Ukrainian state were incorporated into the preamble of the Constitution via the Declaration of Independence of 24 August 1991.
2. The Ukrainian Parliament revises the constitutional amendment of 7 February 2019, which states: “Ukraine strives for full membership in the European Union and NATO,” by deleting the reference to the Atlantic Alliance.

3. The North Atlantic Alliance amends the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine of 9 July 1997 by adding that membership of Ukraine in the Alliance is not intended by the member states.
4. Ukraine
 - reaffirms its permanent neutrality,
 - renounces the development, possession and stationing of nuclear weapons on its territory,
 - will not allow the permanent or temporary stationing of armed forces of a foreign power or their military infrastructure on its territory,
 - will not allow exercises and manoeuvres of foreign armed forces on its territory.

III. Security Guarantees for Ukraine

Long-term, credible security guarantees are an essential precondition for Ukraine to enter peace negotiations. Such guarantees, however, would need to be accepted by Russia as an integral element of any peace settlement. For potential guarantor states, this creates a narrow corridor between preventing renewed aggression through deterrence and risking direct involvement in the conflict should deterrence fail.

Ukraine has called for security guarantees equivalent to the collective-defence commitment enshrined in Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. Although Article 5 declares that an attack on one member is considered an attack on all, it leaves the nature of each state's response undefined. In NATO, this ambiguity is mitigated by detailed defence plans—plans that do not exist in Ukraine's case. As a result, a similar arrangement without explicit, binding commitments from the guarantor powers may fall short of Ukraine's expectations.

1. The sovereignty, territorial integrity and state independence of Ukraine are confirmed and guaranteed by corresponding commitments of guarantor states. The guarantees do not apply to Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk, nor to the Russian-controlled areas of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.
2. The guarantor states designated by Ukraine will not deploy troops to the territory of Ukraine.
3. Ukraine's right to individual and collective self-defence pursuant to Article 51 of the UN Charter remains unaffected.
4. In the event of an attack by Russia on Ukraine, the guarantor states will, at the request of the Ukrainian government, consult within 24 hours in order to decide on appropriate further steps.
5. They will support Ukraine in the exercise of its right to individual and collective self-defence enshrined in Article 51 of the UN Charter.
6. In accordance with the legal and international-law requirements, they will immediately provide modern military equipment and weapons systems, as well as economic and financial assistance, to repel the attack and restore Ukraine's territorial integrity.

IV. Strength of the Ukrainian Armed Forces

1. After the conclusion of the peace treaty, Ukraine will reduce its armed forces within 3 months to a strength of 600,000 soldiers.
2. In the same period, Ukraine will dissolve all paramilitary formations.

C. Ceasefire

A ceasefire can lead to peace only if the parties to the war refrain from reconstituting their armed forces in order to create a better starting position for the continuation of hostilities. Therefore, concrete agreements on the rules for observing the ceasefire must be reached beforehand in the peace negotiations, and these must be enforced by an appropriate monitoring regime equipped with all necessary personnel, technical and material resources (cf. 3).

1. Twenty-four hours after the initialling of the peace treaty, a comprehensive ceasefire between the parties to the conflict, Russia and Ukraine, enters into force. The parties to the conflict cease all hostilities. The ceasefire is carried out without exception and without any restriction or special regulation, regardless of the deployment of opposing armed forces and weapons systems, and is binding in a general and comprehensive manner.
2. From this point onwards, no weapons or ammunition will be delivered to Ukraine. Russia likewise ceases the supply of weapons and ammunition to its armed forces on occupied Ukrainian territory and in Crimea.
3. Compliance with the ceasefire is enforced by a UN peacekeeping force under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

D. Peace Treaty

1. The treaty enters into force once both contracting parties and the guarantor states have signed the treaty and, where required, the parliaments of these states have approved it, and Ukraine has codified its status as a neutral, independent and alliance-free state through an amendment to the Constitution.
2. Any delays do not justify a breach of the ceasefire nor withdrawal from the agreements reached up to that point.
3. Russia withdraws its armed forces completely from all territories controlled by Russia, such as Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv, Sumy and Kharkiv, within 30 days.
4. All members of foreign armed forces, including irregular forces, military advisers and members of foreign intelligence services, are withdrawn from Ukrainian territory within 30 days after the conclusion of the peace treaty.
5. Ukraine holds presidential elections within 120 days, followed by parliamentary and municipal elections.
6. Guarantor states that are members of the European Union will promote Ukraine's membership in the European Union by supporting rule-of-law and democratic reforms.
7. The reconstruction of the Ukrainian economy and infrastructure is promoted through an international donors' conference.

E. Measures to Strengthen Regional Security and Stability

The following measures could, after the conclusion of a peace treaty, constitute the first steps on the path toward the creation of a pan-European security and peace order.

1. Russia withdraws its nuclear-capable short- and medium-range systems from the Kaliningrad Oblast and Belarus. In return, the USA and Germany refrain from stationing American medium-range systems in Germany.
2. Russia withdraws its conventional armed forces from Belarus. In return, the forces relocated to NATO's eastern flank from NATO states are withdrawn to their countries of origin.

3. The USA and Russia agree to conclude a follow-on agreement to the INF Treaty that takes into account the current state of development of hypersonic weapons systems and drones of the relevant range category.
4. The North Atlantic Alliance reactivates cooperation with Russia on the basis of the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 27 May 1997, in particular with regard to the agreed mechanisms and procedures for crisis management and conflict resolution.
5. The North Atlantic Alliance and the Russian Federation
 - agree to update the CFE Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces and in particular to tighten the flank rules,
 - agree on talks on the limitation and verification of European ABM systems, including the NATO Ballistic Missile Defence system,
 - conclude a non-aggression pact, including a “clearing group” and an intrusive verification regime.
6. The USA re-joins the Treaty on Open Skies, which could play an important role in transparency and confidence-building in connection with the security guarantees for Ukraine.
7. The European Union and the Russian Federation conclude an agreement on a European free trade zone.

F. A European Security and Peace Order

In the long term, only a pan-European security and peace order can guarantee the security and freedom of Ukraine, in which Ukraine and Russia have their place. A European security architecture in which Ukraine’s geostrategic location no longer plays a key role in the geopolitical rivalry between the United States and Russia. The path toward this leads via a conference in the CSCE format, which builds on the major achievements of the “Charter of Paris” and further develops them, taking into account the current security-policy and strategic framework conditions.

In this context, the proposal made by the then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in a speech in Berlin on 5 June 2008 could be taken up: to conclude a legally binding European Security Treaty. This proposal aimed to anchor the principles of the Charter of Paris and the Helsinki Final Act in a new, legally binding document in order to create a unified security architecture from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

I. Note

These and all subsequent time indications serve to illustrate the logical connection and sequence of the measures to be taken. The actual time required can only be determined by the parties to the conflict.