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Ukraine

Fighting for the Least Unjust Peace

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Ukrainian leftists hope for an end to the war, but remain sceptical of the “peace deal” on offer.

For many Ukrainians, the past year has felt a bit like Groundhog Day. Now and then, Washington decides to open discussions with Moscow about ending the war in their country, a terrible “peace” proposal pops up, pressure mounts on Kyiv to compromise, a flurry of diplomacy manages to reduce the demands placed on Ukraine, and then Putin brings up his so-called “root causes” for the war — before the whole circus starts over again.

The mid-November leak of a secret [28-point plan](#) negotiated between the US and Russia was the most dramatic iteration of this circus yet. The plan foresaw Kyiv ceding the entire Donetsk region, capping its armed forces at 600,000 troops, dropping any hopes for NATO membership, and prohibiting NATO forces from being stationed on Ukrainian soil. This round also coincided with Ukraine’s most serious domestic political crisis and near-exhaustion on the battlefield.

Modest Progress, Fundamental Problems

As Andrii Movchan, a Ukrainian left-wing activist in exile and organizer of a solidarity campaign in Catalonia, acknowledges, despite containing several conditions unacceptable to Ukraine, the draft is already better than previous proposals. The ceiling on Ukraine’s armed forces is higher, Russia’s non-aggression obligations are recognized, the wording of ideological requirements vis-à-vis minority rights is less alienating, sanctions on Russia are to be removed gradually and on a case-by-case basis, and for the first time, Moscow accepted that it may have to contribute at least some of its frozen assets to Ukraine’s reconstruction.

Another positive sign, according to Movchan, is that Ukraine also agreed to take this revised draft as a basis for further negotiations and is ready to move towards compromises. This pragmatism, however, does not alter the nature of the current proposal. The draft still reads like an imbalanced settlement heavily favouring the Kremlin and granting Moscow control over Ukraine’s foreign policy and a blanket amnesty for war crimes. Taras Bilous, co-editor of the left-wing Ukrainian journal Spilne/Commons and currently serving in the Ukrainian armed forces, reacted particularly strongly to the unilateral limitations on Ukraine’s military, which seem to imply that Ukraine was somehow responsible for the war.

Consultations between Kyiv and Washington in Geneva have since reduced the scope of the framework, but three issues remain unresolved: the size of Ukraine’s army, territorial settlements, and NATO membership for Ukraine. It is hard to imagine Russia compromising on these points and accepting a deal that would not allow it to resume the war at will. In fact, whether Kyiv refused to negotiate, called for a ceasefire, or tried to reach understanding, it had little influence on the Russian agenda of weakening Ukraine. Many are now convinced that as long as Moscow continues to succeed on the battlefield, it will push further.

Rumours that the US would unilaterally recognize Russian demands to overcome the impasse [began circulating](#) in late November. Insights from talks held in Florida [confirmed](#) what many suspected: the agreement addressing Russia’s concerns over NATO membership and Ukrainian territories will be between Washington and Moscow. The dialogue between US and Russian representatives in the Kremlin in early December was “[useful](#)” but [did not bring](#) any breakthroughs.

Former Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valerii Zaluzhnyi recently [noted](#) that while obtaining reliable security guarantees is impossible under current conditions, even a temporary ceasefire in anticipation of the next war might open a window for political changes, deep reforms, and economic recovery for Ukraine. Vitalii Dudin, co-founder of the left-wing group Sotsialnyi Rukh, concurred that there is a chance that Russia's killing machine will slow down in the near future, while Ukraine could at least catch its breath and recover its strength if the war stops. He remains sceptical, however, that signing another document will make Moscow lay down its weapons. Such reservations seem warranted, given that the [Friendship Treaty](#) between Russia and Ukraine signed in 1997, which included mutual obligations to non-aggression and respect for territorial integrity, did not prevent Russia from invading 17 years later, and then again in 2022.

The elephant in the room is the fate of the parts of the Donetsk region that Ukraine still controls. As Putin [underlined](#) in a recent speech given in Bishkek, "Ukrainian troops must withdraw from the territories they hold, and then the fighting will cease. If they don't leave, then we shall achieve this by armed means." For Kyiv, surrendering cities like Kramatorsk or Sloviansk without a fight would constitute a red line. Bilous warns that it would destabilize Ukrainian society and encourage further Russian aggression. After all, two more disputed regions would remain.

Crisis and Leverage

A number of factors affect Ukraine's negotiating position. For one, the war narrows the space for public scrutiny of the Ukrainian government. Therefore, as Dudin ponders, there is doubt concerning the extent to which current political figures have the right to make such consequential decisions for the country in this moment of historic significance. Just recently, a 100-million-dollar [graft scheme](#) revealed at the state-owned nuclear power company Energoatom implicated a former deputy prime minister and compelled two sitting ministers to resign. This crisis came as Russia's systematic onslaught has reduced Ukraine's energy sector to operating at only one third of pre-war capacity, with reconstruction costs estimated at [67.78 billion](#) US dollars. A week ago, amidst ongoing investigations, anti-corruption agencies [raided the home](#) of Andriy Yermak, Zelensky's chief of staff who was effectively in charge of peace negotiations, forcing him to step down.

While 76 percent of Ukrainians [are eager](#) to continue the fight even if the US withdraws its support, the country is in a highly vulnerable position, [facing](#) a 63-billion-dollar financing gap for the upcoming fiscal years of 2026 and 2027. The EU, in turn, has yet to find a way to issue a "reparations loan" to Ukraine without dumping all the risks on Belgium, prompting the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada's Committee on Finance, Taxation, and Customs Policy, Danylo Hetmantsev, to [underline](#) that there is no alternative to complying with IMF demands — which, as usual, are austerity-coded.

There is also another kind of dependency. Since the war began, annual in-kind military donations have [averaged](#) over 40 billion dollars. The issue here exceeds the need to raise funds for purchasing them on the market. Ukraine remains [critically dependent](#) on the US: rocket artillery, long-range anti-aircraft systems, intelligence sharing, and satellite imagery are hard to replace. At the same time, even Ukraine's celebrated drone industry is [highly reliant](#) on Chinese components, with nearly 97 percent of producers identifying China as a primary source of imports.

Meanwhile, war fatigue across Ukrainian society is very real: while rejecting the Russian terms, 74 percent of Ukrainians now [consider](#) freezing the conflict along the line of contact a success of varying degrees, even if over half of them are convinced that Russia will resume hostilities sometime in the future. In the Ukrainian armed forces, meanwhile, over 183,000 AWOL and desertion cases were [registered](#) from January through October 2025 alone — more than in all of 2022–2024 combined.

As much as Washington forcing Kyiv into the deal with Moscow is unjust and morally reprehensible, it is unclear whether Ukraine can withstand the pressure alone, given that Europe is unable to offer much beyond comforting words.

Preparing for the Worst, Fighting for the Best

As Russia advances on the battlefield, leaving devastation in its wake, and international backing becomes more critical than ever, many Ukrainians struggle to understand the stance adopted by the European Left. During heated debates in the European Parliament last month on the peace plan for Ukraine, the Left Group, with the exception of its Nordic MEPs, [abstained or voted against](#) the resolution. While none of them justify the invasion, they tend to focus on condemning hawks, emphasizing the security concerns of both sides, and blaming Europe for sabotaging diplomatic efforts.

Nothing can guarantee forever peace next to a wounded second-tier empire. The role of the military, then, is not to pursue war, but to be ready should everything else fail. While Europe already [spends](#) more on defence than at the end of the Cold War, it is unclear whether it is able to withstand a possible Russian attack. Yet instead of raising the alarm about unpreparedness, the Left largely limits itself to denouncing militarism even as the aggressor continues its assault on Europe's doorstep. Not every country may be directly threatened, but NATO and the EU's mutual defence clauses — and, some would say, solidarity — foster obligations that transcend national borders.

The Ukrainian Left does not believe that diplomacy is enough to ensure the end of the war or exclude its recurrence. They are therefore unambiguous: getting to any meaningful deal requires increasing pressure on Russia. Andrii Movchan warns that, otherwise, "Ukraine will have to accept even worse terms." Taras Bilous concludes that while a fair peace may no longer be possible, "we must fight for the least unjust and safest conditions that can realistically be achieved today so that the war doesn't restart tomorrow". What exactly these will be depends entirely on Ukraine's ability to survive, recover, and resist. The stronger its military capacity, economic resilience, and international backing, the better the settlement it can expect and the longer it will last.

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Source: [Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung](#).

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