



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Kyiv has no reason to be disappointed that it will not enter NATO in the fast lane



At the end of preparations for the NATO summit in Lithuania, there are not many prospects for a reversal on the issue of Ukraine's admission to the Alliance.

There is no current need for consensus on decisions on NATO expansion, and this will certainly be the Alliance's long-term position regarding Ukrainian membership, probably long after the end of Russian aggression and its withdrawal from Ukraine.

However, Kyiv has no reason to be disappointed because of the minor, almost non-existent chances of becoming a member of NATO in the short term.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's recent statement that there is little point in participating in the NATO summit in Vilnius if Ukraine does not receive a clear signal for membership and clear security guarantees reflects some disappointment on the part of Kyiv.

But this is rather a matter of premature and excessive expectations, than of declining support for Ukraine by the Alliance.

Ukraine has no reason to worry that it will be left without strong security guarantees from NATO for the period after the end of the Russian invasion.

The undivided desire in Ukraine to join NATO immediately is in itself a guarantee that the country will remain pro-Western oriented long after the conclusion of peace, and that after the aggression, any eventual turn towards Moscow is completely excluded.

Peace agreement key for guarantees to Ukraine

It is the appearance of the future peace agreement that is of key importance for the future relationship between Ukraine and NATO: so much so, that it is possible that Ukraine's aspirations towards membership in the Alliance will become irrelevant.

If Russia's defeat also causes its orientation away from an aggressive policy towards its neighbours, which is possible in the event of the collapse of Vladimir Putin's regime, it will surely be an important part of the overall security guarantees for Ukraine.

This certainly would not be enough for Ukraine to be in long-term peace with its big neighbour, but placing Russia in a different security framework does not only concern Ukraine, but it is a requirement of the entire security pattern in Euro-Asia for the period after the aggression.

The issue of its membership of the Alliance is therefore closely tied to the prospect of a future peace agreement and the conditions that will be set before Russia.

NATO members are not afraid of Russia

The reluctance of a larger number of NATO members to accept Ukraine in the short term primarily comes from the assumption of obligations under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty to participate collectively in the defence of a member that is attacked.

Certain interpretations from Kyiv that this obligation can be "flexibly" interpreted, i.e., that supporting a member state that has been attacked does not necessarily mean sending troops to that country, are unconvincing.

At the same time, the criticisms of Ukraine against some NATO members that they are "afraid" of Russia, as President Zelensky said earlier, and therefore hesitate to accept his country, are exaggerated.

"All allies agree that Moscow does not have a veto against NATO enlargement", NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg recently repeated during the Alliance's ministerial meeting in Oslo.

He is also persistent in reminding people that there is no doubt among the partners that the door to Ukraine's membership has been open since 2008, and that this goal is being pursued in discussions and cooperation with Kyiv.

However, it is certain that membership and even more serious advancement as demanded by Kyiv is out of the question while the war continues.

"NATO's open door policy remains in place, but at the same time, it is clear that we cannot talk about accepting new members [who are] in the midst of a war", said the head of German diplomacy, Annalena Baerbock.

In Lithuania, security guarantees for Kyiv

That is why the summit in Vilnius will be important for Ukraine above all in terms of formulating NATO's post-war security guarantees, and in this respect Kyiv's influence could be much greater than its current insistence on full membership.

For Ukraine, as well as for its partners in NATO, confirmation of the continuation of abundant military aid, as a crucial condition for the successful end of Russian aggression, is

a priority.

Future solutions and strong security guarantees for the post-peace period could include a certain military presence of NATO members on the territory of Ukraine, as an important part of deterring Russia from a possible renewed invasion attempt.

NATO could even get UN approval for such a mission bypassing the Security Council, where Russia has the right of veto, by a decision of the General Assembly.

This bypassing of the Security Council due to Russia's obstruction has already been applied since the beginning of its aggression against Ukraine.

Apart from a strong deterrent effect, a Ukrainian NATO mission with a UN mandate would have an important task in monitoring the border with Russia, implementing demobilisation and disarmament.

On the other hand, for Ukraine's preparations for full membership, apart from its unquestionable military compliance with Alliance standards, which has been achieved to a certain extent, its progress in the political dimension is also necessary, primarily in the construction of a system of civilian control of the defence forces.

Even after the summit in Lithuania, NATO will have a special relationship with Ukraine and its ambition to become a member, even though that process will take years.

The expansion of the Alliance to the East, first of all to Ukraine, and possibly to Georgia and even Moldova, will be viewed through the prism of relations with Russia even after the achievement of peace.

Post-war changes in Moscow will depend on whether that relationship will be antagonistic, as it is now, or will have the potential to build coexistence, which will exclude any possibility of repeated aggression against Ukraine or any other neighbour.