



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Kyiv's glass was half full at the NATO summit in Lithuania



Ukraine's high expectations that it would receive a clear and time-defined path for its future membership in the Alliance from the NATO leaders did not materialise.

Nevertheless, the pressure of those expectations brought a result. The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, has a reason to return from Vilnius to Kyiv with a substantial catch, which he must be satisfied with for now.

Kyiv deliberately projected expectations from the NATO summit in Lithuania beyond what was achievable, so their collision with reality did not cause disappointment.

Zelensky seemed disappointed at the start of the summit, saying it was "unprecedented" and "absurd" that no time frame had been set for Ukraine's invitation to membership or its admission.

However, after publishing the final announcement, he softened his initial tone of frustration later in the day, and said that he believed that NATO would not "hesitate or waste time as it moved forward", and it was to be hoped, turn his faith into confidence.

Anticipated decision

Extending an invitation for membership to Ukraine was an exaggerated expectation from the Summit in Lithuania, not only from Kyiv but also from the loudest proponents of Ukraine's immediate admission to NATO, before all partners from Eastern Europe.

"We will be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the Alliance when allies agree, and conditions are met", was the key sentence in the final statement of the NATO summit regarding Ukraine.

This was the result of the US position, and partly of Germany, which eventually gained supremacy over the position of the group of Eastern European NATO members, which advocated a clearer and faster commitment of the Alliance to the admission of Ukraine.

This was not surprising wording, because US President Joe Biden said last Sunday that Ukraine was not yet ready for NATO membership and that the Alliance could consider Ukraine's admission only after the end of Russian aggression.

His views have been almost completely incorporated into the NATO statement and even provided a part of a time frame, which has been widely discussed as missing - a decision on Ukraine's membership will be reached after the end of Russian aggression.

Reservations towards Ukrainian membership and its slower progress than expected relate more to civil than military issues, such as good governance and the construction of modern and democratic defence and security institutions.

Many small steps forward

Ukraine gained more in Lithuania than in Bucharest 15 years ago, when it was announced that it would "become" a NATO member, because there was talk of an invitation to membership in Lithuania, despite a lack of a set time frame.

The institutional level of cooperation with Ukraine was raised, and the Ukraine-NATO Council was formed, as a step forward from the previous Ukraine-NATO Commission.

Under this framework, Kyiv will sit on an equal basis at the table with its NATO partners and convene meetings whenever it deems necessary.

Also, one bureaucratic requirement that all candidates must fulfil - the membership action plan (MAP) - was removed for Kyiv as part of the confirmation that the partners see Ukraine in their company in the future.

"What we have agreed to is a very substantive package with many different elements that helps to move Ukraine closer to NATO", said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.

A significant part of the package that President Zelensky will bring to Kyiv from the NATO summit is a coalition of 11 members, which will participate in training Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fighter jets.

The training will start in Romania in August, which is a significant success for Kyiv and for the partner countries that advocated the provision of modern fighter jets because, until just a few months ago, that campaign seemed hopeless.

Ukraine also receives extensive security guarantees from NATO, which include long-term delivery of weapons and equipment, training, and exchange of intelligence data.

The G7 members have undertaken the arrangement with Ukraine as a form of long-term guarantees to ensure that Ukraine is not "left vulnerable to the kind of brutality Russia has inflicted on it again", as UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said.

Ukraine could expect the main benefit from the NATO summit after its conclusion. The very circumstances that led to, at first glance, disappointingly small moves towards its membership will make support for its defence against Russian aggression more extensive and easier to negotiate.

As cautious positions on Ukrainian membership prevailed in Vilnius, Washington and several major Western European allies will be under pressure from their Eastern European partners. They will have to make their membership commitment to Kyiv more specific, increase the sending of military aid and make it more effective.

The imminent start of training of Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fighter jets is a significant part of an apology to Ukraine for the partial failure regarding its expectations from the NATO summit.

Kyiv will not give up lobbying and will repeat its request for membership at the next NATO jubilee summit in Washington next year, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Alliance.

But at the same time, that pressure, accompanied by broad solidarity among numerous European allies, will affect systematic and extensive security support during and particularly after the end of Russian aggression.

The main benefit - after the summit