



By: Iuliia Mendel, TA Kyiv

Pre negotiations for Peace in Ukraine



Donald Trump is to speak with Vladimir Putin. This has the potential to be one of the most momentous geopolitical dialogues of the winter, if not the entire year, as the newly re-elected leader of the largest democracy speaks with one of the most aggressive dictators of our time.

The conversation is inevitable and has been brewing since Trump's re-election in November. The stakes for peace on the European continent are high. Trump understands the need to engage with Moscow to facilitate a ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia.

Although he had previously had discussions with Zelenskyy, these discussions did not appear to have been very enthusiastic. According to reports, French President Emmanuel Macron persuaded Trump to meet with Zelenskyy in Paris in early December last year, despite his initial reluctance.

Currently, the anticipation surrounding potential negotiations is palpable, particularly in light of Trump's forthcoming inauguration. Despite Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's public **opposition** to talks with Putin and his repetitive **scepticism** regarding Trump's intentions, both he and his administration appear to believe that the conflict could end with U.S. intervention under Trump's leadership.

Kellogg's visit to Ukraine

In private conversations, two members of parliament from Zelenskyy's party indicated that he, as early as in May 2024, viewed the resolution of the war as contingent upon Trump's arrival. This echoes 2022, when an associate of Zelenskyy suggested to me that the resolution of the war was dependent on the American midterm elections.

Recently, Volodymyr Zelenskyy's position has become more flattering about the capabilities of the newly elected US president, and in the first **interview** of the year, the Ukrainian leader said he hoped Trump's 'unpredictability' could

be decisive against Russia and help end the war.

Recent trip by Andriy Yermak, Zelenskyy's chief of staff, to the U.S. yielded minimal results

However, it seems that Zelenskyy has not built a strong rapport with Trump. There are rumours that a recent trip by Andriy Yermak, Zelenskyy's chief of staff, to the U.S. yielded minimal results, with even Trump's envoy to Ukraine and Russia, Keith Kellogg, not meeting him.

Kellogg is expected to visit Ukraine soon, with hopes that his trip will take place before the inauguration; however, there is a certain reluctance within the Trump administration to conduct such engagements before their officials are formally appointed, my sources told me.

Europeans are waiting for clearer direction from the U.S.

For this, dialogue with Russia is crucial. Ukraine's demands—such as an invitation to NATO or Western troops **securing** its borders—remain unconvincing to U.S. leadership, both outgoing and incoming.

Moreover, faith in achieving a military victory or maintaining existing support appears to be dwindling.

As such, there is a growing sentiment that the phrase “nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine” is becoming increasingly hollow, serving more as political rhetoric aimed at domestic audiences.

Ukraine's diplomatic overtures of “forcing” Russia to peace are causing some Western leaders to pay little attention to Kyiv's appeals

In truth, Ukraine's diplomatic **overtures** of “forcing” Russia to peace are causing some Western leaders to pay little attention to Kyiv's appeals, as they await clearer direction from the U.S. on how to proceed and ultimately resolve the conflict.

The Ukrainian government and civil society are striving to amplify their voices on the international stage, yet they maintain the stance that military means alone can secure victory.

This perspective is increasingly untenable for various reasons, including a marked decline in the willingness to fight, general war fatigue, and a rising **willingness** to concede territory—jumping from 10 percent in May 2022 to 38 percent by last December. Additionally, shifts in geopolitical outlook are at play.

Ukraine's economy is heavily reliant on Western aid, especially during the recovery phase. It will be impossible to withdraw all aid from Ukraine, and too large a reduction may simply lead to default, which the country managed to avoid with great difficulty during the three years of full-scale war.

Russia's expectations

The Russian economy is also suffering greatly. Although the Kremlin manages to evade some sanctions, interest rates and food prices are soaring, significantly impacting the cost of living for millions of Russians.

In just five months, the rouble has lost over 20 percent of its value against the euro. This might be the major incentive for the Kremlin to agree to peace talks.

For Russia, even a temporary ceasefire could be vital for restoring its credibility on the global stage

However, before they start, Moscow wants to

return the part of its Kursk region controlled by Ukrainian forces.

For Russia, even a temporary ceasefire could be vital for restoring its credibility on the global stage. If it agrees to certain compromises to halt the largest bloodshed in Europe since World War II, Russia will likely push for the lifting of some sanctions, providing it with an opportunity to strengthen domestically.

Negotiations are unlikely to proceed swiftly

A distinct competition appears to be unfolding beneath the publicly proclaimed narrative of support for Ukraine in 2022. European leaders are vying to take the initiative in re-establishing relations with Moscow and are actively seeking a resolution to the conflict.

Recently, Germany has engaged in efforts toward this end. After several conversations between Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Putin, Germany hopes that Russia will end the war in Ukraine this year, as he has already begun to send the appropriate signals.



European leaders are vying to take the initiative in re-establishing relations with Moscow and are actively seeking a resolution to the conflict

With Hungary and Slovakia leading the public discourse for negotiations, this race persists, even in light of the moral complexities involved. Perhaps, however, the true moral imperative lies in ending the bloodshed?

Interestingly, Russia has shown a cautious response to Trump's return to power. Given the lack of **direct** communication for a month and a half, coupled with conflicting messages circulating in the public domain, there are doubts that Trump and Putin will reach an immediate consensus on complex matters such as the war in Ukraine.

Moreover, it's important to consider that Donald Trump aims to increase the supply of liquefied natural gas to Europe, while Putin has just lost a critical transit route for Russian gas to the EU through Ukraine.

While negotiations are unlikely to proceed swiftly, we can anticipate a clearer position from the U.S. in the near future. The conclusion of the war in Ukraine ushers in a series of pressing questions, not least the question of dominance on the global stage.

Regrettably, Ukraine doesn't yet find itself in the position to assert this claim, as it remains embroiled in a gruelling struggle against the relentless advance of Russian forces.

For Kyiv, the sole potential victory at this juncture may lie in achieving a cessation of hostilities—an outcome that could, at the very least, halt the nation's descent into further turmoil.

Yet, the prospect of nudging both Zelenskyy and Putin toward a meaningful compromise is likely to be a protracted endeavour, one that could stretch on for months, if not longer.