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Black Sea peace deal leaves many dissatisfied

The Black Sea ceasefire, which the parties agreed to at the negotiations in Saudi Arabia, appears to be the first major breakthrough on the road to comprehensive peace in Ukraine after three years of war.

Donald Trump's administration, as the main mediator in reaching an agreement, can use this deal to relieve the pressure it is under, as even two months after Trump took office, peace has not yet arrived in Ukraine, which he had promised to achieve within 24 hours.

The Black Sea truce seemed to be a low-hanging fruit in the complicated resolution of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and therefore from the very first moment, it seemed to be a goal that Washington would strive for as soon as possible.

President Trump has achieved a quick win with this agreement, but it may prove more difficult to sustain the deal in the long term than it took time and effort to achieve.

“The United States and Russia have agreed to ensure safe navigation, eliminate the use of force, and prevent the use of commercial vessels for military purposes in the Black Sea,” the White House announced after the agreement reached in Riyadh.

Although Kyiv's representatives were present in Saudi Arabia, they did not take part in the US-Russian negotiations at which the deal was concluded. Regardless of the fact that Kyiv accepted the agreement, the shadow will remain that it was the result of bilateral US-Russian negotiations.

This is the format that the Trump administration established at the very beginning of the efforts to achieve peace in Ukraine, which infuriated Kyiv in particular, as well as all European partners who felt excluded from the resolution of the crisis that directly affects them.

Why did the Black Sea become one of the first issues that the negotiators tackled in order to reach a comprehensive solution?

Reasons why Moscow is satisfied

One of the most important reasons stems from Washington's strategy of discussing peace issues directly with Moscow and leaving other partners out of the equation.

Russia has many interests in the Black Sea ceasefire. Firstly, the ceasefire will allow Russia to reopen its trade corridors for grain and fertiliser exports, which were blocked by the war.

In 2023, Russia unilaterally withdrew from the Black Sea Grain Deal, which, mediated by Turkey and the UN, allowed the export of food and fertilisers from Russian and Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea. This was the only successful peace agreement reached during the three-year war.

> The ceasefire opens the way for Moscow to regain lost positions in a strategically important region

The second reason for Moscow's interest in building peace starting with the Black Sea is of a military nature. The Russian forces were completely pushed out of the Black Sea by the Ukrainian operations, and from a military point of view, the Black Sea is the area where the Russian military suffered one of its greatest defeats.

The ceasefire therefore opens the way for Moscow to regain lost positions in a strategically important region. In a telephone conversation with Donald Trump on 18 March, Vladimir Putin gave a "favourable response" to Trump's proposal on the safety of navigation in the Black Sea, according to the Kremlin.

Ukraine receives no concessions

Ukraine, which agreed to this ceasefire, did not receive any tangible concessions from a

military point of view, as it had already achieved military superiority over the Russian forces in the Black Sea.

Neither did it gain much in economic terms, as trade via its ports had almost returned to pre-war levels thanks to its military successes against the Russian fleet.

> Ukraine has many reasons to be cautious about implementing the agreement

Therefore, its acceptance of the US-Russian deal is a goodwill effort for the success of other peace agreements in which Kyiv is much more interested, especially the moratorium on attacks on energy facilities.

Ukraine has many reasons to be cautious about implementing this agreement, as emphasising the Black Sea as one of the first steps towards a comprehensive peace could indicate that Washington is accommodating Russian efforts to retain control of the Crimean Peninsula, which it annexed in 2014.

Dissatisfaction with renewed Russian influence

The Black Sea peace agreement satisfies Moscow and its interests in a zone where it has suffered severe military and economic damage. But the American mediation in the conclusion of this deal leaves not only the Ukrainians but also their close NATO partners far less satisfied.

Turkey has reason to focus its security interests more on its European partners, who are also strong allies of Ukraine, than on America - Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Romania and Bulgaria, as Black Sea countries, certainly cannot approve of Russia renewing its military influence on the Black Sea with the ceasefire. Turkey, which has the longest coastline on the Black Sea of all the neighbouring states and sees itself as the dominant military force in this region, will also not respond positively.

The possibility of a resurgence of Russian military influence in the Black Sea, the door to which has been opened by the agreed ceasefire, puts Turkey in a position to pay renewed attention to the Russian security challenge, which has been drastically reduced by the Ukrainian operations.

In this respect, Turkey has reason to focus its security interests more on its European partners, who are also strong allies of Ukraine, than on America, which has shown leniency towards Russia's interests with the Black Sea peace deal.