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Peacekeeping mission in Ukraine – Are the Europeans on the verge of its realisation?

Ukraine and its European partners are enthusiastically pursuing agreements on peacekeeping troops, although the prospects for the establishment of such a mission are still unclear and, above all, who could be part of it.

Kyiv and the "coalition of the willing," led by the UK and France, are not discouraged by the scepticism of other influential factors, including the US, regarding the deployment of foreign peacekeepers in Ukraine.

The bloc of Ukraine and its Western European allies will hold "regular meetings" in the coming weeks to work out the details of the troop deployment and mandate, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced on Friday.

High-ranking Ukrainian, British, and French senior officials then met for the first time in Kyiv to discuss the future peacekeeping forces.

The mission format might be finalised “in about a month,” Zelenskyy said, “We are discussing presence on the ground, in the air, and at sea, as well as air defence. And some other delicate matters.”

The acceleration of these peacekeeping agreements comes at a time when the administration in Washington is taking a fairly tough stance on Moscow, which is unusual since Donald Trump took office.

America's anger at Russia

The pendulum has swung to the side of significant dissatisfaction towards Moscow since Donald Trump said last weekend that he was "very angry" and "pissed off" after a telephone conversation with Vladimir Putin.

In this conversation, Putin questioned the credibility of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy and spoke out in favour of an interim government in Ukraine. This was rightly interpreted by the US President as a Russian delay tactic and an attempt to buy time, which is in direct contradiction to his intention and promise to bring peace to Ukraine in the short term.

The US Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirmed this week at the NATO ministerial meeting in Brussels that the US is convinced that Putin is manipulating the process that has just begun and is demanding a delay.

“The Russians and Putin will have to make a decision about whether they’re serious about peace or not. If it’s a delay tactic, President Trump’s not interested in that. We will know soon enough, in a matter of weeks, not months, whether Russia is serious about peace or not.”

> The "coalition of the willing" is trying to exploit the vacuum in the ongoing peace talks

But no matter how convincing the signals from Washington are that they have seen through the Russian delaying manoeuvre and will certainly not allow it, the unpredictability of the American steps regarding Ukraine cannot leave Kyiv and its European allies with the belief that the close positions of the USA and Russia have come to an end.

The acceleration of Kyiv's and the European allies' plans regarding the peacekeeping mission therefore has the logic of exploiting the moment of the US-Russian conflict. Moreover, by accelerating the process, the "coalition of the willing" is trying to exploit the vacuum in the ongoing peace talks, which are dominated by the US-Russian dialogue, by advocating the arrival of partner peacekeeping troops.

The Europeans, led by the UK and France, are taking the opposite approach to that of the Kremlin, which is trying to drag out the peace talks endlessly and to achieve better positions on the ground in the meantime.

Limits before the peacekeeping mission

The question of peacekeeping troops in Ukraine is fraught with numerous limitations. One of these is the still insufficient willingness of even the members of the "coalition of the willing" to participate in this mission.

Donald Tusk, the Prime Minister of Poland, one of Ukraine's closest allies, has already declared that his government does not intend to send soldiers to the territory of Ukraine. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni announced the same in mid-March at a virtual meeting of Ukraine's partners convened by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. The new German government, which will be formed by the end of April, is unlikely to take a different stance.

The position of Russia also represents a restriction. It explicitly rejects the option of stationing soldiers from NATO member states on the territory of Ukraine. The head of diplomacy, Sergei Lavrov, said that such an option would be a "direct threat" to Moscow, and his ambassador to the UN, Vasily Nebenzya, said that such a peacekeeping mission would be a "legitimate target" for the Russian army.

> Russia wants the final peace agreement to be verified in the UN

Russia is confident that the position that the mandate and composition of the peacekeeping mission must be acceptable to both warring parties will prevail in the drafting of a comprehensive peace agreement on Ukraine.

Russia wants the final peace agreement to be verified in the UN, i.e., when it comes to the peacekeeping mission in the Security Council, where it has veto power.

Part of such a strategy is the considerable amount of time passing, which Moscow is counting on. However, as it is under attack from Washington because of this, it is possible that it will be forced to adapt to the faster pace desired by the US.

America's consent as compensation for the Europeans

Under these circumstances, the Europeans work quickly to establish a peacekeeping mission, well aware that they already have substantial political and military influence for this project.

The UK and France, as leaders of the "coalition of the willing", already have enough influence on the international stage to be able to set the framework for the future mission in Ukraine. In addition to their strategy, they have other European allies, such as Finland, Spain, and the Netherlands, but also those outside Europe, such as Canada and Australia.

Setting the framework for a peacekeeping mission soon would be a means of pressurising the USA to endorse it in the further course of the peace process

An important success in this endeavour would be to win over Turkey, which had previously stated that it was considering the participation of its troops in the mission in Ukraine.

The partnership format they have established bypasses NATO, not because Russia insists that the alliance must not be involved in the mission in Ukraine, but rather because of possible obstacles to the deployment of peacekeeping troops by members such as Hungary and Slovakia.

Setting the framework for a future peacekeeping mission soon would also be a means of pressurising the USA to accept such a concept and to endorse it in the further

course of the peace process.

This agreement is necessary for Ukraine's allies, but they can also obtain it as a kind of compensation for the earlier exclusion of the Europeans from the negotiations that Washington decided to start directly with Moscow.