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- The course of the Russian-Ukrainian war

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### ■ *THEME ANALYSIS: How are the Kremlin's 'Trojan horses' destroying the EU?*



Photo: TCH

In the second half of February 2026, the governments of two EU member states – Hungary and Slovakia – launched a fierce campaign of pressure on both the European community as a whole and Ukraine in particular. The reason for this was the suspension of oil transit to these countries via the Druzhba pipeline as a result of its damage during another Russian combined attack on the territory of Ukraine on 27 January 2026. At the same time, ***neither Budapest nor Bratislava condemned the Kremlin's aggressive actions in any way, instead placing all the blame for the infrastructure disruptions on the Zelensky administration.*** In particular, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó stated before the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 23 February 2026 that the shutdown of the oil pipeline was purely a political decision by Ukraine and not the result of any physical damage<sup>1</sup>. According to the minister, this incident is part of a deliberate campaign, coordinated with Brussels, to discriminate against the ruling forces ahead of the parliamentary elections in Hungary. In turn, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, while not directly accusing Ukraine of sabotage, also joined in the harsh rhetoric<sup>2</sup>. The governments of Slovakia and Hungary jointly advocated a ban on diesel fuel exports to Ukraine<sup>3</sup>, as well as emergency electricity supplies<sup>4</sup>, which Viktor Orbán's

<sup>1</sup> Суспільне. *Це політичне рішення України — Сійярто заявив, що нафтопровід «Дружба» не зазнав жодного удару РФ.* <https://suspilne.media/1247364-ce-politичne-risenna-ukraini-sijarto-zaaviv-so-naftoprovid-druzba-ne-zaznav-zodnogo-udaru-rf/>

<sup>2</sup> Суспільне. *Угорщина і Словаччина зупинили експорт дизпалива в Україну: у МЗС відреагували.*

<https://suspilne.media/1243676-ugorsina-i-slovaccina-zupinili-eksport-dizpaliva-v-ukrainu-u-mzs-vidreaguvali/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Суспільне Медіа. *Словаччина припинила екстрені постачання електроенергії в Україну.*

<https://suspilne.media/1247902-slovaccina-prizupinila-ekstreni-postavki-elektroenergii-v-ukrainu/>

government subsequently rejected, taking into account the interests of the Hungarian minority living in Ukraine. Besides the ultimatums, the Hungarian government, unlike the Slovak one, actively included provocative statements in its public announcements, such as the news about the deployment of Hungarian armed forces around its energy facilities to deter possible attacks from Ukraine<sup>5</sup>, as well as the statement by Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó that a Hungarian diplomat in Kyiv had allegedly been hinted at the possible restoration of the oil pipeline in exchange for money and weapons<sup>6</sup>. It should be noted, however, that according to the findings of the EU Coordination Group, which includes Hungarian, Slovak and Croatian experts, the suspension of Druzhba does not currently pose a threat to the Union's energy security<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, the Europeans have found an alternative transport hub in the form of the Croatian oil terminal on the island of Krk and the Adria oil pipeline. Hence, although European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called on the Ukrainian government to carry out repairs on the oil pipeline as soon as possible, the Druzhba incident does not pose a critical threat to the EU. As for the consequences for Ukraine, according to Ukrenergo's estimates, they are not significant (at least in the short term)<sup>8</sup>. Instead, this is a matter of political 'games' between two European players.

It is noteworthy that the peak of activity by the Orbán and Fico governments regarding this incident occurred in the second half of February, while the oil pipeline itself was damaged and suspended on 27 January. In addition, earlier, on 26 January, the EU Council also adopted a provision on the phased abandonment of imports of Russian pipeline gas and liquefied natural gas<sup>9</sup>, to which representatives of the Hungarian and Slovak governments responded with a promise to sue the EU<sup>10</sup>. Hence, given that obstacles to the import of two cheap Russian commodities – oil and gas – arose within a short period of time, Viktor Orbán and Robert Fico most likely played the 'Ukrainian' card to put pressure on Brussels. An argument in favour of this thesis is the fact that the radicalisation of rhetoric and diplomatic demarches coincided with the period when the EU Council began the process of approving legislation enabling Ukraine to receive a loan of €90 billion for 2026-2027<sup>11</sup>. This loan was a compromise when, in December last year, the European community faced a problem in reaching a consensus on the formalisation and approval of the so-called 'reparation loan' for Ukraine, which was to be financed from frozen Russian assets. At that time, a number of European players opposed this initiative, including Slovakia, Hungary, Italy, Belgium, Malta, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic<sup>12</sup>. This was yet another sign of the lack of unity in the EU, in addition to the obvious asymmetry in the

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<sup>5</sup> TSN.ua. Угорщина розгортає війська через загрозу від України: заява Орбана.

<https://tsn.ua/svit/uhorshchyna-rozhortaye-viyska-cherez-zahrozu-vid-ukrayiny-zaiava-orbana-3029168.html>

<sup>6</sup> Європейська правда. У МЗС заперечили заяви Сійярто про те, що Україна просить "гроші і зброю" за ремонт "Дружби". <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/news/2026/02/26/7232078/>

<sup>7</sup> Європейська правда. ЄС про результат наради з Угорщиною та Словаччиною щодо "Дружби": "ризик поки немає". <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/news/2026/02/25/7231964/>

<sup>8</sup> Hromadske. Допомогу від Словаччини просили рідко, тож припинення постачання електроенергії не вплине на енергомережу – «Укренерго».

<https://hromadske.ua/energetyka/259887-dopomohu-vid-slovachchyny-proslyly-ridko-toz-prypynennia-postachanni-a-elektroenerhiv-ne-vplyne-na-enerhomerezu-ukrenerho>

<sup>9</sup> EEAS. Рада ЄС остаточно схвалила поступову заборону імпорту російського газу.

[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B0-%D1%94%D1%81-%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%BE-%D1%81%D1%85%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D1%83%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%83-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%83-%D1%96%D0%BC%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%82%D1%83-%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%96%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%8C%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE-%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%B7%D1%83\\_uk](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B0-%D1%94%D1%81-%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%BE-%D1%81%D1%85%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D1%83%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%83-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%83-%D1%96%D0%BC%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%82%D1%83-%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%96%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%8C%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE-%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%B7%D1%83_uk)

<sup>10</sup> Babel.ua. Угорщина та Словаччина пообіцяли подати до суду на ЄС через заборону імпорту російського газу.

<https://babel.ua/news/124553-ugorshchina-ta-slovachchina-poobicyali-podat-i-do-sudu-na-es-cherez-zaboronu-importu-rosiysko-go-gazu>

<sup>11</sup> LB.ua. ЄС зробив крок до кредиту Україні на 90 млрд євро попри блокування Угорщиною.

[https://lb.ua/world/2026/02/24/724125\\_rada\\_ies\\_rozblokuvala\\_chastinu.html](https://lb.ua/world/2026/02/24/724125_rada_ies_rozblokuvala_chastinu.html)

<sup>12</sup> Forbes.ua. Шість країн ЄС проти надання Україні репараційного кредиту – Euractiv.

<https://forbes.ua/news/sim-krain-es-proti-nadannya-ukraini-reparatsiynogo-kreditu-euractiv-15122025-34857>

distribution of member states' costs for aid to Ukraine<sup>13</sup>. It should be noted that without this money, the Ukrainian government will be forced to cut budget expenditures as early as spring 2026, which is why the allocation of these €90 billion is critically important for the Ukrainian economy<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, neither Slovakia nor Hungary are participating in the financing of this loan.

However, it should be noted that although their motivations and interests coincide in some respects, they mostly diverge. As for the common aspect, Robert Fico has a direct political benefit from the victory of the ruling Fidesz party in the parliamentary elections in Hungary. Hungarian propaganda has become an important factor influencing Slovak Hungarians, which, among other things, ensured the Slovak prime minister's victory in the elections. Like Orbán's political campaign, Fico's position is also based on 'peaceful' arguments, one of which is to prevent Slovaks from being drawn into a war against Russia<sup>15</sup>. Hence, Viktor Orbán's retention of power is a source of pre-election assistance from the Hungarian government. Moreover, both countries remain largely dependent on Russian energy imports. As of February 2026, Russian oil accounts for 92% of Hungarian imports (compared to 61% in 2022), while Slovakia remains almost entirely dependent on Russian oil<sup>16</sup>. It should be noted here that, despite the EU ban on Russian oil imports after the start of the full-scale invasion, an exception was made for three countries – Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia – due to their geographical and economic particularities. But while the Czech Republic has pursued a path of diversifying its energy market<sup>17</sup>, Hungary and Slovakia, as statistics show, are only increasing their trade with Russia. During 2023-2025, these two European actors repeatedly resorted to blackmail to counter any institutional restrictions on Russian energy imports. Thus, the policy of undermining EU unity in exchange for satisfying their own national interests (and those of the ruling elites) is a consistent trend of the Fico and Orbán governments, and the incident with the Druzhba oil pipeline is just a pretext to create an artificial crisis and achieve further concessions from Brussels. However, the European community is now taking an increasingly firm stance on this issue, the latest example of which is the European Commission's proposal for a permanent ban on Russian oil<sup>18</sup>. Most importantly, this legislative initiative will be submitted by the Commission after the parliamentary elections in Hungary, so the Orbán government will have no grounds to accuse the EU of undermining its position.

Regarding Hungary specifically, playing the 'Druzhba' card is one of Viktor Orbán's main tools for boosting the popularity of the Fidesz party ahead of the parliamentary elections. According to Bloomberg, the opposition party TISZA has overtaken the ruling party by 20% in the polls<sup>19</sup>. In such situations, state leaders often resort to a principle known in political science as 'rally round the flag'<sup>20</sup>: boosting the government's popularity among the population by effectively resolving a crisis. Of course, it is possible that such crises can be created artificially – and in the case of Hungary and the Druzhba oil pipeline, this is most likely the case. Now, as of the end of February 2026, Hungary is blocking the allocation of the approved loan, citing the aforementioned incident with the oil pipeline. However, it is assumed that the real motive for

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<sup>13</sup> BBC News Україна. ЄС дав Україні рятівні 90 млрд євро, але не з російських активів. Деталі надзвичайного рішення. <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/cvgqzew7qv7o>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Європейська правда. Шляхом Орбана: що стоїть за антиукраїнськими діями Роберта Фіцо. <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/articles/2026/02/27/7232045/>

<sup>16</sup> DW. Чи справді Угорщина та Словаччина так залежать від "Дружби". *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/uk/ci-spravdi-ugorsina-ta-slovaccina-tak-zalezat-vid-naftoprovodu-druzba/a-76123032>

<sup>17</sup> BlackSeaNews. Чехія відмовляється від винятку із санкцій ЄС щодо імпорту російської нафти. <https://www.blackseanews.net/read/224572>

<sup>18</sup> Радіо Свобода. ЄС запропонує постійну заборону на російську нафту після виборів у Угорщині – ЗМІ. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-zaborona-nafta-yes-uhorshchyna-vybory/33687154.html>

<sup>19</sup> Bloomberg. Orbán's poll support crumbles as Hungary opposition widens lead. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-02-25/orban-s-poll-support-crumbles-as-hungary-opposition-widens-lead>

<sup>20</sup> Baker, W. D., & Oneal, J. R. (2001). Patriotism or opinion leadership?: The nature and origins of the "rally 'round the flag" effect. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45(5), 661–687. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3176318>

vetoing is the desire to approve a request to the SAFE programme for €17.4 billion<sup>21</sup>. Although this initiative is intended to help boost Europe's defence capabilities, Orbán's government needs this money primarily to reduce interest expenses on its debt. Among other things, this financial situation has arisen due to increased spending ahead of the elections in order to halt the decline in the Fidesz party's ratings.

Another manifestation of Hungary and Slovakia undermining EU unity is their blocking of the 20th package of EU sanctions against Russia<sup>22</sup>, which provides for additional restrictions on exports and imports, a complete ban on maritime services, and an expansion of the list of Russia's 'shadow fleet' vessels. This initiative was supposed to be implemented before the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, Orbán's government vetoed this sanctions package, linking Hungary's approval to the resumption of the Druzhba oil pipeline<sup>23</sup>. For its part, the Slovak government argues that such a move could undermine the negotiation process between Russia and Ukraine, initiated and moderated by the United States<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, this issue remains in limbo and is not on the immediate agenda of the Committee of Permanent Representatives<sup>25</sup>.

The last aspect that should be emphasised in the context of the Hungarian and Slovak vectors undermining the initiatives of the European community is the case of the Coalition of the Willing. Founded in March 2025, this cooperative platform is designed to provide Ukraine with support and strong security guarantees for the establishment of lasting peace. One of the key mechanisms of this European security regime is the Multinational Forces. These are military contingents that are to be deployed to support the ceasefire/truce regime after the end of hostilities and the signing of a peace treaty. As of February 2026, only France and the United Kingdom have agreed to deploy their contingents, although the details of the tasks and powers of these groups are still being discussed and worked out<sup>26</sup>. It is noteworthy that Slovakia and Hungary have taken a sceptical stance towards the Coalition of the Willing. Péter Szijjártó noted that the Paris Declaration of 6 January 2026 is a provocation that brings the EU closer to war with Russia<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, the Minister of Foreign Affairs directly pointed out that Hungary is not concerned with the Russian-Ukrainian war, calling it 'theirs'<sup>28</sup>. Slovakia's position in this context is not as sharp and unambiguous as Hungary's. As for the Coalition of the Willing, Robert Fico does not rule out the possibility of Slovakia's participation in monitoring missions, but sending Slovak armed forces to Ukraine is not being considered. In general, the Prime Minister emphasised that he prefers direct dialogue with Kyiv rather than through the Coalition. This position of Budapest and Bratislava clearly fits in with the general line of their governments, which play on the absence of military aid to Ukraine and limited participation in 'provocative' initiatives through the prism of 'peace.' However, this agenda has a destructive impact on the EU and the European community as a whole, especially in the context of strategic uncertainty caused by the sharp change in US foreign policy strategy.

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<sup>21</sup> Європейська правда. Угорщина хоче отримати від ЄС 17,4 млрд євро на оборону.

<https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2025/12/2/7226171/>

<sup>22</sup> Forbes.ua. ЄС не зможе затвердити 20-й пакет санкцій проти Росії до річниці вторгнення – Каллас. *Forbes Україна*.

<https://forbes.ua/news/es-ne-zmozhe-zatverditi-20-y-paket-sanktsiy-proti-rosii-do-richnitsi-vtorgnennya-kallas-23022026-36548>

<sup>23</sup> Orbán Viktor. We will not stand idly by while the Friendship oil pipeline is shut down. We will secure Hungary's fuel supply and take necessary countermeasures until shipments resume.

[https://x.com/pm\\_viktororbán/status/2025537802025206270?s=46&t=8pifNsDmfXHd\\_YxQHWe6Vg](https://x.com/pm_viktororbán/status/2025537802025206270?s=46&t=8pifNsDmfXHd_YxQHWe6Vg)

<sup>24</sup> Європейська правда. Словаччина вважає, що ухвалення 20-го пакета санкцій "може перервати мирні переговори" з

РФ. <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2026/02/23/7231813/>

<sup>25</sup> Українська правда. 20-й пакет санкцій ЄС проти РФ узгодили, але його гальмують.

<https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2026/02/27/8023131/>

<sup>26</sup> TSN.ua. Коаліція охочих: які країни погодилися відправити миротворців в Україну, а хто відмовився.

<https://tsn.ua/svit/koalitsiia-okhochykh-yaki-krayiny-pohodylysia-vidpravty-myrotvortsiv-v-ukrayinu-a-khto-vidmovyvsia-2994809.html>

<sup>27</sup> TSN. Угорщина офіційно відкинула Паризьку декларацію.

<https://tsn.ua/svit/uhorshchyna-ofitsiyno-vidkinula-paryzku-deklaratsiiu-2994824.html>

<sup>28</sup> UNIAN. Це їхня війна: Сійярто видав цинічні заяви про Україну, Сібіга різко відповів. *Українська правда*.

<https://www.unian.ua/world/ce-jihnya-viyna-siyarto-vidav-cinichni-zayavi-pro-ukrajinu-sibiga-rizko-vidpoviv-13289970.html>

Thus, the campaign of blackmail and pressure on the EU currently being conducted by Slovakia and Hungary – especially the case of the Druzhba oil pipeline – indicates a looming crisis of the institution. The result is Europe's inability to provide a decisive response to a number of systemic challenges, including the issue of regional autonomy, participation in the negotiation process to end the Russian-Ukrainian war, and the development of a unified position for making important decisions. Under these circumstances, the Zelenskyy government and the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry have no choice but to continue calling on the European community to take more decisive action to bring about a just peace, as well as to resist the Russian Federation and those European actors whose actions not only undermine the EU's activities but also directly harm Ukraine's national interests.

## Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine

- *THEME ANALYSIS: From Munich 2007 to the Munich Conference 2026: how the world of security has transformed into a world of danger*



*Photo: Radio Liberty*

The Munich Security Conference, held on 13-15 February 2026, highlighted the significant changes that have taken place in the current world order. In particular, there has been a fundamental shift in the strategic vectors of US foreign policy, including with regard to Europe and NATO. Although this year's speech by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio was more restrained and diplomatic in tone than last year's speech by US Vice President JD Vance, the key trend of the new agenda remains unchanged: the type and scope of the US's responsibilities as the guarantor of European security architecture have been revised – and not in the latter's favour. However, as the senior US official emphasised separately, leaving Europe is not in the national interests of the US. This raises a logical question: what is the Trump administration's vision of the role and place of the United States in the current system of international relations, and is the current world order really going through a phase that the Munich Security Conference report describes as 'under destruction'<sup>29</sup>?

The mechanism and conditions for changing the balance of power in international relations (and thus the system as a whole) can be demonstrated using the example of power transition theory, developed by Abram Fimo Kenneth Organski<sup>30</sup>. According to this theory, the decline of a hegemonic state or the growth of the potential of a great power that thus encroaches on the hegemony's leadership is highly likely to provoke war/confrontation between these actors. In this context, several questions arise: 1) where is the line beyond which a great power begins to

<sup>29</sup> Munich Security Conference. (2026). *Munich Security Report 2026*. <https://securityconference.org/en/publications/munich-security-report/2026/>

<sup>30</sup> Organski, A. F. K. (1961). *World politics*. Knopf.

pose a threat to the hegemony's leadership?; 2) is there really a player that can currently take on the role of the United States in terms of its power potential? All these points boil down to the question of 'power,' which takes into account not only the quantitative aspect, but also the qualitative (i.e., functional) aspect. If we conduct a comparative analysis between states, for example, BRICS and the US, based on parameters such as GDP<sup>31</sup> (including per capita GDP), defence spending<sup>32</sup>, military power<sup>33</sup>, regional leadership and the existence of an extensive network of alliances and partnerships, the US ranks first in all categories. Although the selected parameters are not exhaustive in demonstrating hegemonic status, they do include, in addition to physical indicators, the attributive nature of power — the ability to lead and promote the global agenda. Exemplary cases include the tariff war, joint operations with Israel against Iran, the Peace Council initiative, and the operation to kidnap Nicolás Maduro. Regardless of the results, goals, and consequences of these steps, what is important here is that none of the Global South countries that appeal to the injustice of the current world order have taken practical steps to counter the United States. Thus, it can be argued that at the time of the Munich Security Conference in 2026, the role of the United States in the modern world order, and therefore in global security, remains decisive, but under the Donald Trump administration, its *modus operandi* has been calibrated towards removing some systemic 'burdens' from itself.

In continuation of the last thesis, it is worth mentioning the two latest doctrinal documents that define the current foreign policy course of the United States: the National Defence Strategy (2026)<sup>34</sup> and the National Security Strategy (2025)<sup>35</sup>. According to these documents, the priority direction is the Western Hemisphere, i.e. the regions of North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. As for China, although this challenge is no longer a priority, Washington continues to use a strategy of containment to defend its own and its allies' interests in the Indo-Pacific region. In addition, Russia is also recognised as a threat, but not from the perspective of military power claiming hegemony in Europe, but as the state with the world's largest nuclear potential. As for NATO and the EU, the challenge posed by Russia is manageable. With this, the United States intends to delegate security and defence issues to the European states themselves. In its current form, this approach bears little resemblance to the 'porcupine' strategy (autonomisation through armament), but rather is pressure from the patron on the client to raise the latter's level of defence capability and agency. Therefore, as Marco Rubio noted in his speech, leaving Europe is not on the agenda of Donald Trump's administration, but such a sharp change in approach compared to Joseph Biden's term, which took place against the backdrop of the biggest war in Europe since World War II, is causing a certain 'shock' effect on the European community.

Concerning Europe itself, the results of this year's Munich Conference give reason to assert a change in attitude towards the Russian-Ukrainian war. According to an analytical note by the National Institute for Strategic Studies<sup>36</sup> speeches by top officials such as Emmanuel Macron, Friedrich Merz and Ursula von der Leyen indicate an awareness that the strategy of outsourcing security and defence to Ukraine has run its course and is no longer effective. In particular, the following key points should be noted. First, in an era marked by rivalry between major powers, Europe must become a 'geopolitical superpower'<sup>37</sup>. Second, Europe's security and defence models, whose potential, despite their quantitative superiority over Russia, has not been

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<sup>31</sup> Worldometer. *GDP by country*. <https://www.worldometers.info/gdp/gdp-by-country/>

<sup>32</sup> Global Firepower. *Defense budget by country (2026)*. <https://www.globalfirepower.com/defense-spending-budget.php>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Department of Defense. (2026, January 23). 2026 National Defense Strategy. <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>

<sup>35</sup> The White House. (2025\_November). National Security Strategy of the United States of America. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> National Institute for Strategic Studies. (2026). *Підсумки Мюнхенської конференції з безпеки 2026*. <https://niss.gov.ua/doslidzhennya/mizhnarodni-vidnosyny/pidsumky-myunkhenskoyi-konferentsiyi-z-bezpeky-2026>

<sup>37</sup> Що ми зрозуміли після Мюнхенської конференції. Аналіз BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/cm2r1r68736o>

fully realised, need to be modified<sup>38</sup>. Third, the issue of creating a European army has become a strategic necessity<sup>39</sup>. The fourth is that, despite the United States' reaffirmation of its commitment to the transatlantic community, Europe must create its own initiatives and platforms (albeit within the framework of NATO, such as the idea of extending the French nuclear umbrella beyond national borders)<sup>40</sup>. Fifth, there is a recognised need to invest in European defence, taking into account the Ukrainian experience<sup>41</sup>. However, despite these optimistic signals, in practice there is a lack of consensus on the aspect of European consolidation. For example, Spain immediately expressed scepticism about the creation of a European nuclear initiative independent of the US. Ukraine's accession to the EU, which, according to the leaked provisions of the US plan for a peaceful settlement, is one of the points of the future peace agreement, is another issue on which no consensus has been reached. And finally, there are calls from the French government to resume constructive dialogue between Europe and Russia<sup>42</sup>. Justified by the need to deal with Russia regardless of the outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian war, this initiative, according to Kaia Kallas, requires the European community to develop a common position before it can be implemented, and there is currently no unity on this issue either<sup>43</sup>. In the context of the idea of European involvement in negotiations with Russia, the main driver is the claim, expressed by Emmanuel Macron among others, that the European community should be involved in the process of resolving the Russian-Ukrainian war. The argument in favour of this is that the security regime that will be created as a result of a potential peace agreement will not only determine the security agenda of post-war Ukraine, but will also be an important parameter in the pan-European security architecture. As of the end of February 2026, after three rounds of negotiations between the United States, Ukraine and Russia, Europe is not represented in the negotiation process. However, the reason for this is not the fundamentally anti-European position of the United States, but rather the lack of political will on the part of European actors. The Coalition of the Willing – the only European format for involvement in conflict resolution – focuses on ensuring a post-war security regime. Europe has no significant influence on the course of the war and the peace process (apart from providing military and financial assistance to Ukraine<sup>44</sup>). Hence, it is quite logical that there are no grounds for involving European leaders in the negotiation process. Given the new rhetoric and vision of the United States, it can be assumed that Washington's prerequisite for allowing European delegations to participate in the negotiation rounds is a more decisive position on the part of Europe regarding security guarantees for Ukraine. However, at present, the mechanism of the Coalition of the Willing, including the Multinational Forces, is not fully defined and institutionalised. In addition to the lack of political will and readiness of some states to take on specific commitments, unfavourable conditions include increased party rivalry (particularly in France<sup>45</sup>, Germany<sup>46</sup> and the UK<sup>47</sup>) and a lack of unity within the EU, caused, among other things, by the positions of Hungary and Slovakia. Thus, until Europe begins to realise its defence

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> National Institute for Strategic Studies. (2026). *Підсумки Мюнхенської конференції з безпеки 2026*.

<https://niss.gov.ua/doslidzhennya/mizhnarodni-vidnosyny/pidsumky-myunkhenskoyi-konferentsiyi-z-bezpeky-2026>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> *Макрон: Європа має розробити правила співіснування з Росією*. Deutsche Welle.

<https://www.dw.com/uk/makron-evropa-mae-rozrobiti-pravila-spivisnuvanna-z-rosieiu/a-75965390>

<sup>43</sup> Суспільне медіа. Каллас закликала країни ЄС скоординуватися перед контактами з Путіним.

<https://susplne.media/1237006-kallas-zaklikala-kraini-es-skoordinuvatisa-pered-kontaktami-z-putinim/>

<sup>44</sup> Euromaidan Press. Allies pledge record \$45bn for Ukraine in 2025 as 17 countries commit to 2026 military aid.

<https://euromaidanpress.com/2025/12/17/ramstein-2025-ukraine-45-billion-military-aid-commitments/>

<sup>45</sup> LB.ua. Прем'єр Франції наказав готуватися до дострокових виборів.

[https://lb.ua/world/2026/01/10/716102\\_premier\\_frantsiyi\\_nakazav.html](https://lb.ua/world/2026/01/10/716102_premier_frantsiyi_nakazav.html)

<sup>46</sup> Укрінформ. *Ультраправа «Альтернатива для Німеччини» зберігає перше місце в рейтингах*.

<https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/4076633-ultraprava-alternativa-dla-nimeccini-zberigae-perse-misce-v-rejtingah.html>

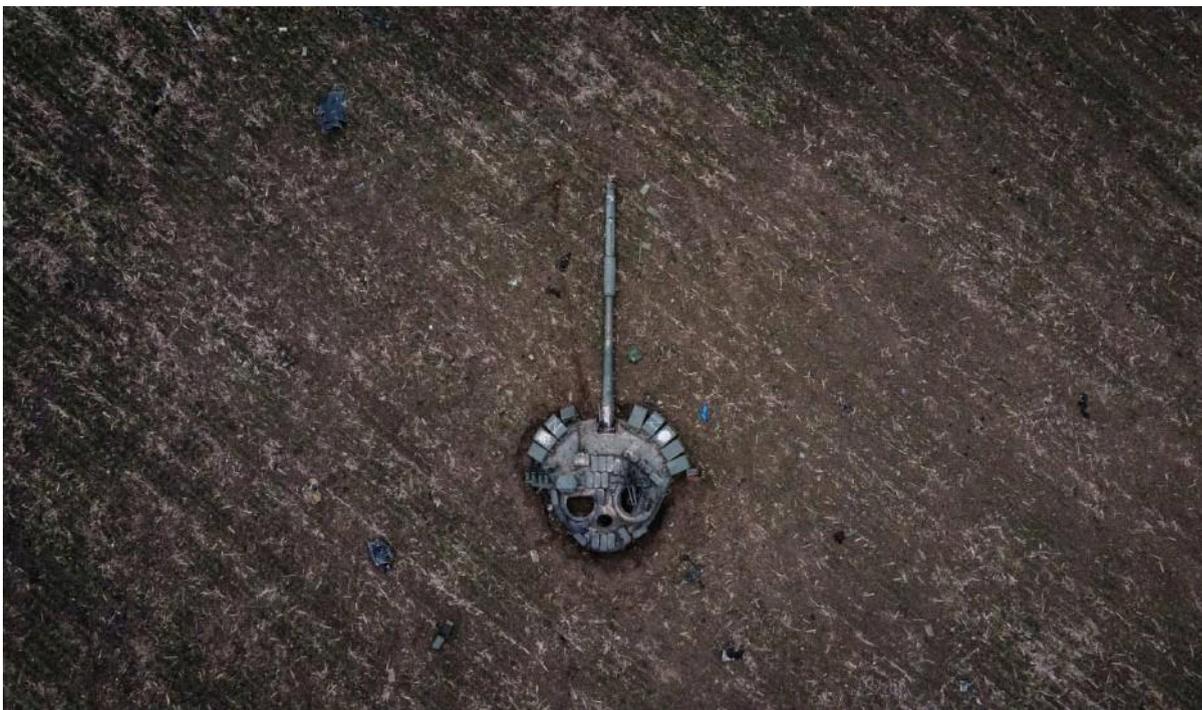
<sup>47</sup> Mind.ua. Путін дуже поганий тип: британські ультраправі хочуть дистанціюватися від Росії.

<https://mind.ua/news/20300822-putin-duzhe-poganiy-tip-britanski-ultrapravi-hochut-distanciyuvatisya-vid-rosiyi>

and security potential and take responsibility for the region's security architecture, its interests are unlikely to be taken into account and satisfied in the context of strategic confrontation between such powers as China, the United States and Russia.

As far as Ukraine is concerned, the results and conclusions of the Munich Security Conference demonstrate that *official Kyiv is forced to make decisions in conditions of strategic uncertainty and imbalance. While the United States still maintains its leadership, it is noticeably retreating from its transatlantic responsibilities as a guarantor, and Europe is facing an unprecedented challenge that requires a radical review not only of the security aspect, but also of the foundations of European integration as such.* In this period of turbulence, **Ukraine has no other relevant options but to continue to resist Russian aggression and call on European leaders to take a more decisive stance.** Otherwise, the interests of sovereign Ukraine will be disregarded in favour of an artificial realignment of forces in the region by major powers.

## The course of the Russian-Ukrainian war



*Photo: Army FM*

### ■ *Changes at the frontline*

Commander of the 429th Separate Brigade of Unmanned Systems ‘Achilles’, Hero of Ukraine Yuriy Fedorenko believes that Russia is still capable of maintaining a high intensity of combat operations, but its resources are not unlimited. The war is putting increasing pressure on the economy, requiring enormous expenditures and constant replenishment of personnel.

The first half of 2027 is the period when the most active phase of hostilities will begin to fade. This is due to the ability, including that of Russia, to maintain stable financing and support its occupation contingent. The key factor will be its ability to finance the occupation forces and maintain stable supplies to the army.

Separately, Fedorenko emphasises the role of Western partners. In his opinion, 2026 will be a test of strategic endurance for Europe and the United States. If the sanctions policy remains in place and military aid to Ukraine — in particular, air defence systems, long-range missiles and financial support — is not reduced, Russia will gradually lose its ability to build up its offensive capabilities. He warns that if support for Ukraine weakens, the Kremlin may gain additional resources to continue the war or even expand the geography of the conflict. In such a scenario, threats to the Baltic states cannot be completely ruled out, as Russia traditionally exploits windows of opportunity when it senses weakness in the West<sup>48</sup>.

However, any proposals for ‘agreements’ from Moscow should be seen as an attempt to buy time and stabilise the economy after the war has taken its toll. Such initiatives will not signal a change in Russia's policy, but will merely be a tactical move to regroup. In the spring, the Russians may try to intensify their military operations if they manage to build up their reserves. However, losses will be a key factor. If the rate of losses in the Russian army exceeds its ability to replenish its ranks, its offensive potential will gradually decline. If the Kremlin manages to

<sup>48</sup> 2026 стане переломним: військові та експерти спрогнозували весняні плани росіян.  
[https://24tv.ua/2026-stane-perelomnim-viyskovii-eksperti-sprognozuvai-vesnyani\\_n3011823](https://24tv.ua/2026-stane-perelomnim-viyskovii-eksperti-sprognozuvai-vesnyani_n3011823)

ensure a steady influx of personnel, the intensity of the fighting may continue. This is especially true as the situation near Pokrovsk is gradually approaching a critical point. If the city is captured, Russian troops will try to advance towards the Sloviansk-Kramatorsk agglomeration and may also intensify their actions on other sections of the front.

After all, Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, Kostiantynivka and Druzhkivka remain strategic targets for the Russian command.

*In the Lyman direction*, the Armed Forces of Ukraine repelled enemy assaults in the areas of the settlements of Stavy, Lyman, and Drobysheve.

*In the Sloviansk direction*, the occupiers advanced in the direction of Rai-Oleksandrivka and in the areas of Zakitne and Dronivka.

*In the Kostyantynivka direction*, the occupiers carried out assault operations near Pleshchiivka, Ivanopil, Illinivka, Stepanivka and in the direction of Novopavlivka.

*In the Pokrovsk direction*, fighting is ongoing in the areas of Toretsk, Nove Shakhove, Rodynske, Myrnohrad, Pokrovsk, Udachne, Kotlyne, Molodetske, and towards Novooleksandrivka, Hryshyne, and Novopidhorodne.

*In the Oleksandrivka direction*, the Russian Federation advanced in the areas of Sichneve and Ternove.

## ■ *Military aid*

During the Ramstein meeting on 12 February 2026, partners confirmed the allocation of \$38 billion in military aid to Ukraine. The funds will be used to purchase drones, air defence systems and Patriot missiles<sup>49</sup>. According to Ukrainian Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov, more than \$6 billion will be allocated in specific aid packages, including more than \$2.5 billion for Ukrainian drones, more than \$500 million for the PURL programme, \$2 billion for air defence, as well as funds for artillery ammunition, training, maritime capabilities and other areas.

- **The United Kingdom** is allocating £500 million to air defence and contributing £150 million to the PURL initiative. In total, it is providing £3 billion in military aid to Ukraine in 2026.
- **Germany** is allocating at least €1 billion to purchase drones for Ukraine and will finance the air defence ‘dome’ project over our cities and the drone assault unit project as part of its €11.5 billion aid budget for Ukraine.
- **Norway** has allocated \$7 billion in 2026, of which \$1.4 billion is for drones, \$700 million for air defence, \$200 million for artillery, and \$125 million for PURL.
- **The Netherlands** has pledged to allocate at least 0.25% of its GDP to Ukraine's defence in 2026 and has announced a contribution of €90 million to PURL.
- **Belgium** will allocate €1 billion in military aid this year.
- **Sweden** has announced a 24th aid package worth €1.2 billion and a contribution of €100 million to PURL. In total, it is allocating €3.7 billion for this year.

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<sup>49</sup> Україна забирає з "Рамштайну" один із найбільших бюджетів підтримки: що в пакетах.  
<https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/ukrayina-zabirae-ramshtaynu-odin-iz-naybilshih-1770973157.html>

■ *Russia: External and internal challenges*

**Trend: *Four years of full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war: diplomacy above all else as a choice to lose everything***



*Photo: Meduza*

The full-scale phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war, given its chronological boundaries (from 24 February 2022 to the present), can be divided into two qualitatively different periods: 2022-2024, coinciding with Joseph Biden's term in office, and from early 2025 to the present, beginning with Donald Trump's inauguration as US president. The basis for this categorisation is the difference in the approaches of the two American administrations to the course of events and the peaceful settlement of the war in Ukraine.

The specifics of the Ukrainian vector in American foreign policy strategy can be viewed through the prism of conflict maturity theory<sup>50</sup>. According to this theory, the most favourable moment for opening negotiations is when the parties to the conflict reach a 'stalemate' on the battlefield. The realisation of the absence of either operational or tactical superiority over the opponent, as well as the inability to turn the tide of events in one's favour, pushes the players to engage in constructive dialogue. Hence, the pursuit of further gains and a better position shifts from the military to the diplomatic sphere. Third parties, known as mediators, play an important role in this process, helping to develop an agenda that is mutually acceptable to all parties to the conflict. In this context, it is worth noting that, given the dynamic nature of the situation on the front lines, as well as the influence of external factors, this moment of 'maturity' may be short-lived, which is why its timely recognition and the start of diplomatic work along this track

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<sup>50</sup> Zartman, I. W. (2008, December 20). "Ripeness": The importance of timing in negotiation and conflict resolution." *E-International Relations*.  
<https://www.e-ir.info/2008/12/20/ripeness-the-importance-of-timing-in-negotiation-and-conflict-resolution/>

are key. Otherwise, the opportunity for a peaceful settlement will be lost, or, on the contrary, the party/parties will be drawn into an asymmetrical and disadvantageous negotiation process.

A characteristic feature of the Biden administration's approach to the Russian-Ukrainian war after 24 February 2022 was the diplomatic isolation of Russia and substantial military and financial assistance to Ukraine. Thus, in 2022-2023, Ukraine received 114 billion US dollars in several tranches<sup>51</sup>, as well as more than 30 billion euros from the EU<sup>52</sup>. It is noteworthy that this period saw the Ukrainian Armed Forces successfully repel Russian aggression, namely with a counteroffensive towards the Kharkiv and Kherson regions. The fact that the initiative was in favour of the Ukrainian side at that time is evidenced by the Kremlin's intensified 'nuclear' rhetoric<sup>53</sup>. Although the start of negotiations with Russia at this stage was disadvantageous for Ukraine, by the end of 2023 this military campaign had exhausted itself, not least because of the insufficient quantity and pace of arms deliveries from the West. ***The failure of the summer counteroffensive in 2023 also contributed to the shift in the balance of power away from Ukraine.*** Along with the strategic miscalculation of the leadership, the situation was also complicated by delays in the supply of weapons. The dynamics of US financial aid allocation are also telling, having declined significantly in 2024 compared to 2022-2023<sup>54</sup>. The last significant military campaign conducted by Ukraine during Biden's term in office – ***the Kursk operation*** – was more symbolic and political in nature, while from a strategic point of view, the eastern and southern front lines remained critical<sup>55</sup>. At the same time, it is worth noting that the diplomatic dimension of the conflict resolution, which had previously been limited to issues of military and financial aid and pressure on Russia, became more active at this time. Thus, in 2023, following the NATO summit in Vilnius, the G-7 states adopted a corresponding declaration, the essence of which was to strengthen Ukraine's defence and intelligence capabilities on a bilateral basis<sup>56</sup>. Since then, security agreements have been concluded on this basis, numbering 28 as of November 2025<sup>57</sup>. Furthermore, in June 2024, the Peace Summit was held, attended by 92 countries and representatives of eight international organisations. Despite significant attention from the international community, this diplomatic initiative did not yield significant results: only three of the ten points of the Ukrainian peace formula were discussed — nuclear and food security, as well as the return of prisoners and deportees. At the same time, in 2023-2024, Russia began to actively establish alternative military-industrial complex production capacities, along with supply and trade chains with the countries of the so-called Global South (in particular, China, Iran and North Korea). Thus, at the end of Joseph Biden's presidential term, the Ukrainian side not only lost the strategic initiative, but also failed to institutionalise any constructive negotiating platform.

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<sup>51</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. *Here's how much aid the United States has sent Ukraine.*  
<https://www.cfr.org/articles/how-much-us-aid-going-ukraine>

<sup>52</sup> Європейська Комісія. *Factsheet EU Solidarity with Ukraine (UK)* [PDF]. EU for Ukraine.  
[https://eu4ukraine.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Factsheet\\_EU\\_Solidarity\\_with\\_Ukraine\\_UK.pdf](https://eu4ukraine.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Factsheet_EU_Solidarity_with_Ukraine_UK.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> "Війна без фіналу: чому ніхто не може перемогти та як змінювався баланс сил. Пояснюємо." *Еспресо.TV.*  
<https://espreso.tv/oborona-ta-bezpeka-viy-na-bez-finalu-chomu-nikhto-ne-mozhe-peremogti-ta-yak-zminyuvavsya-balans-sil-poyasnyuemo>

<sup>54</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. *Here's how much aid the United States has sent Ukraine.*  
<https://www.cfr.org/articles/how-much-us-aid-going-ukraine>

<sup>55</sup> Paulo Aguiar. *Ukraine's Kursk offensive: Symbolic gains, strategic costs.* *Geopolitical Monitor.*  
<https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/ukraines-kursk-offensive-symbolic-gains-strategic-costs/>

<sup>56</sup> Зеленський, В. До декларації G7 про гарантії безпеки приєдналися майже 30 країн – Зеленський. *Радіо Свобода.*  
<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-zelenskyv-hrupa-semy-harantiyi-bezpeky/32566090.html>

<sup>57</sup> Міністерство оборони України. *З ким Україна має безпекові угоди і що вони передбачають: пояснення Міноборони.*  
<https://mod.gov.ua/news/z-kim-ukrayina-maye-bezpekovi-ugodi-i-shho-voni-peredbachayut-poyasnennya-minoboroni>

With Donald Trump's arrival in power, there was a radical change in the US approach and vision of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Since then, the vector of diplomatic isolation of Russia has been replaced by a strategy of opening channels and involving the parties to the conflict in the negotiation process. In February 2025, Trump's team unilaterally initiated contact with the Russian Federation<sup>58</sup>, which was accompanied by meetings between American and Russian delegations, as well as unprecedented pressure on the Zelensky administration, culminating in a scandalous meeting between the President of Ukraine and US President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance in the Oval Office. At the same time, no new financial aid for Ukraine has been approved since the end of 2024: as of December 2025, the US had spent 58% of the total amount allocated during the Biden administration<sup>59</sup>. In addition, since 2024, the situation on the front lines has resembled a 'war of attrition': neither Ukraine nor Russia is capable of radically turning the tide of war in its favour. However, this cannot be called a 'stalemate' because, albeit slowly and with huge losses, the Russian Armed Forces continue to advance deep into the country<sup>60</sup>. Another trend during this period is the active use of technology in combat, primarily combat drones, as a result of which technological innovation has become a prerequisite for achieving strategic initiative. The response to this agenda was the activation of Europe and the creation of the Coalition of the Willing – attempts to institutionalise an alternative security platform. In addition, the deficit in financial and military support for Ukraine, which arose as a result of the change in US strategy, also had to be addressed through the joint efforts of the European community: According to Ukraine Support Tracker (Kiel Institute)<sup>61</sup>, in 2025, European military spending increased by +67% relative to the average level of 2022–2024, and non-military (financial/humanitarian) spending increased by +59%. However, as early as April 2025, the US signalled its intention to play a leading role in future Russian-Ukrainian negotiations when the American side effectively derailed the European track in London, having previously presented its 'Peace Plan'<sup>62</sup> to Ukraine and a number of European states. It was characteristic that its points were similar to the provisions of the so-called Istanbul Agreements of 2022<sup>63</sup> (with the exception of the issue of neutrality), and even more oppressive in terms of territorial concessions. After the meeting between Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelenskyy on 28 April 2025 in the Vatican, given the reaction of the leaders of the respective states, Trump's 'Peace Plan' formed the basis of the initial negotiating framework<sup>64</sup>. According to the theory of international conflicts, the negotiation process always begins with the parties setting inflated and unrealistic demands and interests. In the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Trump administration apparently developed this agenda with the aim of bringing Russia into the peace

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<sup>58</sup> Слово і Діло. *Переговори про припинення війни Росії та України: позиції сторін, ключові питання* [Інфографіка]. <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2025/02/17/infografika/polityka/perehovory-pro-prypynennya-vijny-rosiyi-ta-ukrayiny-pozycziyi-stori-n-klyuchovyx-pytan>

<sup>59</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. *Here's how much aid the United States has sent Ukraine*. <https://www.cfr.org/articles/how-much-us-aid-going-ukraine>

<sup>60</sup> "Війна без фіналу: чому ніхто не може перемогти та як змінювався баланс сил. Пояснюємо." *Еспресо.TV*. <https://espresso.tv/oborona-ta-bezpeka-viyna-bez-finalu-chomu-nikhto-ne-mozhe-peremogti-ta-yak-zmynuvavsya-balans-sil-poyasnyemo>

<sup>61</sup> Kiel Institute for the World Economy. *Ukraine Support Tracker*.

<https://www.kielinstitut.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>

<sup>62</sup> Європейська правда. *Не тільки Крим, не тільки НАТО. Нерозкриті деталі "мирної угоди" між Україною, США і Росією*. <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2025/04/23/7210115/>

<sup>63</sup> Kyiv Heritage. *Переговори в Стамбулі 2022: текст проекту договору*. <http://kyiv-heritage.com/article/peregovory-v-stambule-2022-tekst-proekta-dogovora>

<sup>64</sup> РВС-Україна. *Чи буде мир: Трамп, Зеленський і Путін зробили важливі кроки. РВС-Україна*. <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/chi-bude-mir-tramp-zelenskiy-i-putin-zrobili-1745850982.html>

talks, as evidenced by the ‘pro-Russian’ nature of the April 2025 version of Trump's plan. After that, and until August 2025, the main goal of the rounds of meetings between representatives of the United States, Ukraine, and Russia (in various formats and at various levels) was for the parties to achieve the most advantageous positions possible. However, there is a clear theoretical flaw on the part of Washington, because, unlike the Kremlin, official Kyiv had significantly fewer resources to maximise its national interests – primarily in terms of the quantity of weapons and defence systems. As a result, Russia is currently using various tools to drag out the negotiation process in order to weaken Ukraine and gain maximum benefits, while Ukraine has no choice but to contain Russia on the battlefield and call on its Western partners to take more decisive action.

The current stage of peace negotiations, which began as a result of the meeting between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin in Anchorage in August 2025, is marked by more lively dynamics and more constructive results. Compared to the rounds of negotiations in Istanbul (May-July 2025), the meetings between Ukrainian, Russian and American delegations and high-ranking officials in September-December 2025 began to discuss specific provisions of the future peace treaty and security guarantees for Ukraine. Key among these were the meetings in Geneva (23 November 2025), Abu Dhabi (25 November 2025), Miami (30 November, 20 December 2025), Berlin (14 December 2025), Mar-a-Lago (28 December 2025), Moscow (2 December 2025, 22 January 2026). A significant shift towards an increasingly constructive dialogue between Kyiv and Washington was the revision of Trump's 28-point plan<sup>65</sup>, presented in November 2025, to a 20-point version<sup>66</sup>. In particular, the following points were removed: 1) the thesis on the return of the Russian Federation to the global economic system (G-8); 2) the obligation to constitutionally enshrine Ukraine's rejection of Atlantic integration; 3) the thesis on the inadmissibility of deploying NATO contingents on the territory of Ukraine; 4) the thesis on the deployment of European fighter jets in Poland; 5) the clause on frozen Russian assets; 6) the mention of the establishment of a Russian-American working group on security issues; 7) the statement on cooperation between the Russian Federation and the United States on non-proliferation treaties, in particular START-1. In addition, several points have been modified, namely: 1) the number of Armed Forces personnel has been increased from 600,000 to 800,000; and 2) elections (primarily presidential) are to be held as soon as conditions are favourable, rather than 100 days after the signing of the future peace agreement. However, it should be noted that, according to the Russian side, the updated Plan contradicts the agreements reached between the US and Russia in Anchorage, as stated by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov<sup>67</sup>. Despite this, work on the American-Russian track was active, one of the results of which was the meetings between Russia and Ukraine in Abu Dhabi and Geneva, held with the mediation of the US in January-February 2026. This may also indicate the existence of two negotiation tracks with different agendas – Ukrainian and Russian.

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<sup>65</sup> Mankovska, V. 28-point peace plan for Ukraine-Russia war, Europe's amendments, and Geneva negotiations. Gwara Media. <https://gwaramedia.com/en/28-points-peace-plan-for-ukraine-trumps-proposal-europes-amendments-and-results-of-negotiations-in-geneva/>

<sup>66</sup> Rubryka. Zelenskyi unveils details of 20-point peace plan for the first time.

Rubryka. <https://rubryka.com/en/2025/12/24/zelenskyj-vpershe-rozkryv-zmist-20-punktiv-myrnogo-planu/>

<sup>67</sup> Лавров, С.: Россия в Анкоридже приняла предложения США по Украине, но теперь Вашингтон сам к ним не готов. Meduza.

<https://meduza.io/news/2026/02/09/lavrov-rossiya-v-ankoridzhe-prinyala-predlozheniya-ssha-po-ukraine-no-teper-vashington-sa-m-k-nim-ne-gotov>

However, given the lack of significant results at the end of the third round of negotiations in Geneva<sup>68</sup>, particularly regarding the establishment of a ceasefire/truce and the status of territories and the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant (while Russia continues to shell critical and civilian infrastructure), there is reason to believe that **the diplomatic efforts of the United States have not yet paid off**. The reason for this is that while the conflict may have reached a 'stalemate', this only applies to Ukraine, while Russia continues to advance on all fronts and carry out large-scale combined attacks on Ukrainian cities. It is this *factor of asymmetry in the balance of power that plays into the Kremlin's hands, allowing it to drag out the negotiation process while maintaining its 'face' as an actor ready to implement peace initiatives and engage in dialogue with the Ukrainian leadership*. If the key mistake of the Biden administration was to neglect negotiations as such and delay financial and military aid, then **the flaw in the Trump team's approach is that they began this peace process by putting pressure on Ukraine rather than Russia**. Such a course of events could have helped to level the asymmetry and eliminate the Kremlin's strategic initiative. Hence, it is quite logical to conclude that the only possible option for Ukraine to achieve a just peace is not diplomatic efforts, but first and foremost significant assistance in armament and financing, accompanied by increased pressure on the Russian Federation. The significant weakening of Russia (and Putin's regime) is a prerequisite for the intensification of the negotiation process, not the other way around. Thus, **the main task of the Zelenskyy administration and the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry is to continue to halt Russian aggression on the battlefield and to encourage partners, through various means, to take a more decisive stance and take more significant measures**.

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<sup>68</sup> BBC News Україна. "Важкі, але ділові". У Женеві завершилися мирні перемовини: які результати <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/c0lj0p8pk6wo>