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- Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine
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Ukraine – European Union

■ *THEME ANALYSIS: Oil interests block the adoption of sanctions in the EU*



Photo: AFP

On 16 December, the Council of the European Union adopted the 15th package of economic and personal sanctions against Russia, including officials from North Korea and Chinese suppliers of drone components. The new measures are aimed at combating the circumvention of EU sanctions, including against Vladimir Putin's shadow fleet, and at weakening Russia's military-industrial complex. The package covers 54 individuals and 30 organisations. The sanctions were imposed, in particular, against the military unit that attacked the Okhmatdyt children's hospital in Kyiv, top managers of the energy sector, those responsible for deporting children and propaganda, and two officials of the DPRK.

For the first time, the EU sanctions targeted Chinese entities supplying drone components and microelectronics that support Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The list also includes a chemical plant, defence and shipping companies, and a civilian airline that supplies logistical support to the Russian military. The new sanctions include a ban on access to ports for third-country vessels supporting Russia's energy sector or military transport, including the transport of stolen Ukrainian grain. On 16 December, 52 vessels were sanctioned, bringing the total number to 79. Also, 32 new entities supporting the Russian military-industrial complex were added to the list. Some of them are based in China, India, Iran, Serbia and the UAE and facilitate the circumvention of sanctions or the purchase of military equipment for Russia.

It is worth noting that the EU has previously refrained from imposing sanctions on Chinese companies, unlike the US, which imposed such restrictions in October. Even so, some proposals were not included in the 15th package of sanctions against Russia. In particular, Slovakia was allowed to export Russian oil products to the Czech Republic until June 2025.

Also, no sanctions were imposed on liquefied natural gas (LNG). Lithuanian Foreign Minister Kęstutis Budrys emphasises the need for such measures, as Europe has imported about 5 billion cubic metres of Russian LNG this year. He also called for higher tariffs on goods from Russia and Belarus.

Loopholes remain for the more than 600 European companies still operating in Russia. Budrys called this direct support for the Russian economy, stressing the need to end their activities. The EU Council explains that the extension of certain exemptions is necessary to complete the withdrawal of capital from the Russian market. At the same time, companies are advised to close their business in Russia or avoid new investments due to high risks.

However, it is worth noting that the new package of sanctions itself was a long and painful process. On 6 December, EU countries failed to agree on the 15th package of sanctions against Russia, in particular because of disputes over the timeframe for European companies to withdraw from Russia and the issue of extending the Czech Republic's permission to import oil products from Russia through Slovakia.

Meanwhile, revenues from exports of crude oil and petroleum products remain a key source of financing for Russia's military spending, including purchases of military equipment and dual-use goods abroad. ***The volume of maritime exports of crude oil from the Baltic Sea ports, which account for about 60% of total exports, determines the duration of the war and the financial burden on EU countries.*** Over time, the EU and other countries in the region, including Norway and the UK, are likely to take restrictive measures, despite the expected strong reaction from Russia. At the same time, many experts point out that the fight against Russia's 'shadow fleet' is pointless, as such a fleet does not exist. In fact, these are just tankers transporting Russian oil, and their activities are obvious to those who want to see them.

Discussions about a '***price ceiling***' also make no sense, as this mechanism has never worked. It is impossible to control the falsification of documents on the cost of cargo, and compliance with the price ceiling is prohibited by a presidential decree and is closely monitored. Around 30% of crude oil from Russia is transported by tankers of companies registered in Greece, and this actually supports Russian exports.

The real goal should be to reduce maritime exports of Russian oil and oil products as the main source of funding for Russian aggression. In September 2024, Russia's maritime exports of crude oil totalled about 20 million tonnes. Of this volume, 60% is transported through the Baltic Sea, which is the most significant and accessible region for influence. Opportunities to influence transportation in the North, the Far East and through the Turkish Straits are limited due to political and geographical factors, including Turkey's position.

Every month, 150-170 tankers transport Russian oil from the Baltic Sea ports (without LNG), including about 100 large tankers carrying 110,000 to 150,000 tonnes of crude oil each. Over the past six months, the number of vessels transporting oil and oil products from the Baltic and Black Sea ports is estimated at 900-1000, including 300-400 crude oil tankers. Greek shipowners carry out more than 30% of the traffic. If we take into account companies registered in Cyprus and Moldova, an EU candidate country, this figure rises to **34.2%**. Tankers from 'flag of convenience' countries (offshore jurisdictions) account for only 10-12%. 93% of crude oil from the Baltic and Black Sea ports goes to India, China, Singapore and Turkey. Up to 7% is transshipped off the coasts of EU countries or even to their ports, which violates the embargo. For oil products, the ratio is about 83:17.

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has launched an investigation into a loophole that allows countries, including Turkey, to export Russian oil to the EU by changing its

labelling. This was made possible by circumventing Brussels' sanctions, which allow the import of “mixed” fuel if it is labelled as non-Russian. According to Politico, this scheme has led to Moscow receiving up to €3 billion from just three Turkish ports in the 12 months since sanctions were imposed on Russian oil in February 2023. This practice allows Russia to circumvent European sanctions and maintain trade in fossil fuels, which is an important source of income for the Kremlin. The investigation is being conducted against the backdrop of deteriorating relations between Brussels and Ankara over Turkey's support for Russia. OLAF has not yet commented on the launch of the investigation.¹

And so far, the progress on this path of getting off the Kremlin's oil needle has been rather slow. The EU has already adopted the 14th package of sanctions against Russia, which included measures against the Russian ‘shadow’ fleet and a stricter ban on flights of Russian aircraft. With the adoption of these sanctions, a new tool was introduced to designate specific vessels supporting Russia's war against Ukraine, and 27 vessels, including 17 tankers transporting Russian oil, are currently on the list.

On 16 December, the Baltic and North Sea countries signed a declaration in Tallinn that provides for stricter insurance requirements for tankers transporting Russian oil. According to the declaration, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Finland and Estonia instruct their respective maritime authorities to require appropriate insurance for suspected ‘shadow’ vessels passing through the English Channel, the Great White Sea, the Sund and the Gulf of Finland. This step was probably taken to assess the first practical reactions. According to the data, as of September 2024, 99 tankers were transporting Russian crude oil, of which 45 had P&I insurance policies, which is 45.5%. The rest of the vessels were insured by companies in India, China, etc. Thus, the information about the ‘vast majority of uninsured tankers’ is exaggerated. In fact, Western countries can take several steps to reduce the volume of maritime transport of Russian crude oil and oil products:²

1. The EU, or a coalition of EU and NATO member states, should declare a ‘special period’ on the coasts of the Baltic and Black Seas, which would allow for a temporary suspension of the application of international maritime law on freedom of navigation and transit. This will allow for tougher measures to be taken without violating international agreements.
2. The EU should ban EU shipowners from transporting Russian oil and oil products from Russian ports. This will quickly reduce the volume of supplies by 30 per cent and create a shortage of tanker fleet for Russia.
3. The EU or the Baltic states should include in the sanctions lists all tankers that have transported Russian oil and oil products in the last six months. These sanctions will restrict access to maritime services in EU countries, including ports and pilotage.
4. The EU should temporarily introduce mandatory pilotage in the Danish Straits connecting the Baltic and North Seas. This will limit the passage of sanctioned tankers through important waterways.
5. In parallel with these measures, expert discussions should be held on the impact on world oil prices and possible steps to compensate for the negative effects of Russia's countermeasures.

¹ Тіньвовий флот. Як Росія попри санкції продовжує везти нафту в Європейський Союз 26.11.2024.
<https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2024/11/26/7486266/>

² 6 кроків, щоб зупинити нафту з Росії: як ЄС може протидіяти морській торгівлі агресора 19.12.2024.
<https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2024/12/19/7201004/>

6. The EU should tighten sanctions against EU ports, prohibiting the reception of tankers loading oil and oil products at raid transshipment facilities, which will limit embargo violations and reduce Russian imports by up to 10%.

Restricting Russia's maritime oil exports from the Baltic Sea may face difficulties due to Russia's strategy to drive up global oil prices. As early as August 2024, Russia began taking measures to prevent a decline in prices, which is unacceptable for a country waging an aggressive war. In September 2024, several tankers were spotted sailing from Russian Baltic Sea ports around Africa, bypassing the Suez Canal. This route is much longer and more expensive, which indicates Russia's intention to create panic in the oil markets by attacking tankers in the Red Sea, which could lead to higher oil prices.

Additionally, Russia has the ability to increase prices by reducing the supply of Kazakh oil to the EU, which was replaced by Russian oil after the embargo was imposed. Russia could suspend Kazakh oil exports at any time, which would create problems for EU countries such as Italy, the Netherlands, Greece and France. In view of this, the restriction of Russia's maritime exports should be implemented gradually, in coordination with other partners, in particular the United States, and countries that are increasing their share of the global energy market. In addition, it is important to avoid importing energy from war zones, which increases risks. Therefore, Kazakhstan's reorientation to new routes, such as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, is timely, although it will face resistance from Russia. Nevertheless, this strategy should be pursued, as there is an impression of indecision due to too much economic gain. So far, there are active actors who do not hesitate to say that for the sake of economic gain, they are ready to sacrifice the security of the entire region and Ukrainian territories, such as Hungary and Slovakia. However, this mood of uncertainty is also present in other countries, which is certainly a threat.

The change of leadership in the EU and NATO, the new conditions of international relations under President Donald Trump, and the development of conflicts in Ukraine and Syria created an important context for the EU summit on 19 December 2024, where support for Ukraine was actively discussed. An important point was that European leaders significantly increased their engagement, holding numerous bilateral meetings with President Zelensky, as well as an informal dinner hosted by the new NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte. This format was a welcome contrast to the previous style of his predecessor, Jens Stoltenberg.

The summit communiqué summarising the discussions with Ukraine contains an important statement: **'Russia must not win'**. This is the first time that such wording appears in the conclusions of the European Council, and it was adopted by the leaders of all 27 EU countries, including Viktor Orban. Diplomats noted that this phrase essentially means support for Ukraine's victory, but the emphasis on *'Russia must not win' sends a more specific message to the United States, especially given the future policies of the new Trump administration. Thus, the Summit demonstrated the EU's determination to support Ukraine, emphasising the need to ensure its victory in the war, reflecting changes in the political landscape of Europe and a strategic approach to geopolitical challenges.*

At the European Council Summit in Brussels on 19 December 2024, the urgency and need to increase military support to Ukraine was particularly emphasised. According to the communiqué, the EU called for urgent efforts to help Ukraine defend itself against Russian aggression, including through the provision of air defence systems, ammunition and missiles, and training for Ukrainian brigades. This reflects the specific demands that President Zelenskyy has repeatedly raised, including the lack of equipment and training for military

units. The summit was also a moment of frank acknowledgement that **the EU does not always fulfil its commitments to Ukraine**. Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said that despite numerous promises, actual support often lags behind the required level. He called for more decisive action, recalling that the EU should become a global strategic player, which means making decisions rather than endless discussions.

European Council President Antonio Costa announced his intention to increase pressure on those who support Russia in escalating the war and to work on new ways to strengthen support for Ukraine. European leaders also pledged to provide assistance in the area of energy security, in particular through the supply of air defence systems to protect Ukraine's energy facilities. During the European Council summit, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky stressed that Europe's assistance alone is not enough to effectively counter Russia. He stated that joint support from the US and Europe is needed to stop Putin and save Ukraine. V. Zelensky stressed the importance of NATO as a true guarantee of security for Ukraine, although he did not reject temporary options for guarantees from individual states on the way to the Alliance. However, journalists did not receive an answer to this question from EU leaders, in particular from Antonio Costa and Ursula von der Leyen, who refrained from commenting on Zelensky's opinion. The EU plans to hold the next summit in March 2025, when Donald Trump will be re-elected as US president.

In other words, the EU Summit demonstrated a positive declarative character, but not much of a course of action. However, **the more Europe delays, the more time and privileges Russia will get**. Sacrificing its own security for the sacrifice of Ukraine is a rather short-sighted move, but in the long run it pushes the EU towards decline and exposes it to great danger.

Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine

■ *THEME ANALYSIS: Preemptive visit: will it change Trump's plans?*



Source: AFP

On 7 December 2024, French President Emmanuel Macron organised a meeting for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and US President-elect Donald Trump. The talks will take place against the backdrop of the opening ceremony of the restored Notre Dame de Paris Cathedral. It is known that at this time, Zelensky arrived in Paris for a series of meetings, while Donald Trump, who arrived at the Elysee Palace, made his first foreign visit after being elected to the post of American president. Trump said that he was honoured to be in Paris and stressed that the situation in the world is becoming increasingly complex and they plan to discuss these issues.

Emmanuel Macron had to make great efforts to convince Donald Trump to meet with Volodymyr Zelensky during his visit to Paris to open Notre Dame Cathedral. At first, Trump did not agree to the meeting, but eventually changed his mind. The meeting lasted 45 minutes and was described as *'good and fruitful'*. Zelensky said that they discussed the situation on the ground, a *'just peace'* and agreed to continue cooperation. This comes as Trump prepares to take office and plans to begin a diplomatic process to end the war between Russia and Ukraine. Trump also stated his desire to conclude a deal to end the war.

At the meeting, the leaders of France and Ukraine tried to convey their vision of a sustainable peace in Ukraine, but did not discuss specific details on a possible ceasefire format. Trump reiterated his desire for an 'immediate ceasefire' but generally showed a willingness to listen. **The Ukrainian side stressed that a simple ceasefire without security guarantees would not be sufficient, as Russia could re-energise and resume attacks.** Macron and Zelensky were careful to explain this to Trump, emphasising the importance of US support for Ukraine.

Zelensky suggested that 'Putin is only afraid of Trump and maybe China', noting that a strong US position is important for sustainable peace. Macron also stressed Europe's significant contribution to supporting Ukraine and its willingness to invest more in collective defence, noting that Putin is much different now than he was in 2017, when Trump was dealing with him as US president. Trump, in turn, said after the conversation that he was 'ready to negotiate' and that he was developing a concept to end the war quickly.

Volodymyr Zelensky also stressed the importance of security guarantees for Ukraine in any agreement to end the war with Russia. Trump, for his part, emphasised his desire to achieve an immediate ceasefire and start negotiations to end the conflict quickly. According to the sources, Trump was friendly and respectful, and showed a willingness to listen and consider all the details.

Zelensky stressed that peace without proper security guarantees would not be sustainable, as Russia could violate any agreement, as it has done before. Trump, according to sources, considered this remark and is 'thinking about all the details'. Officials close to Trump said that he is focusing his meetings on building personal relationships, which is an important element of his diplomacy, and that he will ultimately decide how to proceed. But for Europe, it will be important to convey that without Washington's help, Kyiv will not be able to effectively counter Russia's aggression. In his turn, Donald Trump suggested that *the ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine should be monitored by European troops, not American ones*. Trump also noted that he does not support Ukraine's accession to NATO, although he is in favour of a strong and well-armed Ukraine. He believes that Europe has a key role to play in defending and supporting Ukraine, including peacekeeping through European military forces. He also called on European countries to pressure China to influence Russia to end the fighting.³

But the very next day, Trump said on social media that Ukraine had senselessly lost 400,000 soldiers and many more civilians. He stressed that **Russia had lost interest in the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria because of the situation in Ukraine**. Volodymyr Zelensky refuted Trump's figure for Ukraine's losses, noting that 43,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed since the beginning of the war and 370,000 have been wounded, half of whom have returned to service. Zelensky also clarified that Russian losses exceed 750,000, including 198,000 dead.

Speaking about the outcome of his meeting with Donald Trump, Volodymyr Zelensky said that they had discussed the situation on the battlefield and the need to achieve a just peace for Ukraine, giving a positive assessment of the event. He stressed that both sides wanted a quick and fair end to the war and agreed to work together to achieve peace through strength. The interlocutors described the conversation as warm and constructive. Asked by journalists about the possibility of changing Trump's position on the frozen situation on the contact line, V. Zelensky said that this was still at the discussion stage and that further meetings and teamwork were needed to make progress.

This event was an important diplomatic step in the context of finding ways to maintain Ukraine's strong position. Although no specific decisions or agreements were reached during this meeting, it laid the groundwork for further negotiations and cooperation. **Despite the different approaches to resolving the conflict, the discussion of security guarantees for Ukraine and a possible ceasefire demonstrates the parties' interest in stabilising the**

³ WSJ: Трамп сказав Макрону і Зеленському, що припинення вогню мають контролювати європейські війська. 12.12.2024. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-trump-prypynennja-vohnju-europejski-vijska/33237913.html>

situation. However, Trump's position on freezing the front line and delaying Ukraine's integration into NATO, as well as his statements about the need for a stronger role for Europe in supporting Kyiv, are still unacceptable. **For Ukraine, it is important to maintain Washington's full support and avoid any territorial losses that would only delay the war and give Russia important advantages.**

This visit demonstrated Ukraine's readiness to actively engage international partners in discussions of a *'just peace'*. **At the same time, the results of the negotiations are still minimal.** However, it should not be forgotten that Donald Trump as a politician is quite unpredictable. It is also important to note that before the inauguration, he is still trying to provoke his electorate, and therefore we can expect his position to become less radical afterwards. In any case, it seems that the visit had a favourable effect on Trump's ego, which is important in his decision-making.



Source: Army FM

■ Changes at the front

Trend: *The culminating period of the war has come, during which there has been a fundamental change in its course in favour of Russia, after which Ukraine, for both objective and subjective reasons, is no longer able to stop the enemy's offensive or seize the initiative at the front. And so far, all trends do not indicate that Ukraine will be able to turn the tide in our favour even in the long term*

The delay in aid from the United States, combined with issues within the military, has hindered efforts to contain Russia's offensive. Moscow has been conducting an offensive operation for over a year, achieving slow but steady progress. **Ukraine, standing alone without any military allies, is forced to defend itself against an anti-Western military coalition comprising Russia, North Korea, and Iran, under China's guidance.**

Currently, Russia is concentrating its efforts on capturing the southern part of the Donetsk region, particularly areas where occupation forces have made their most significant breakthroughs since taking Avdiivka. The most challenging frontlines are near Velyka Novosilka and Kurakhove. The Velyka Novosilka area is partially encircled, with Russian forces cutting off two roads north of the town and regaining control over some settlements along the Mokri Yaly River that Ukrainian forces liberated in 2023.

Kurakhove, a critical defensive hub for Ukrainian forces in southern Donetsk, is almost entirely under the aggressor's control, except for the Kurakhove Thermal Power Plant. The situation south of this area, in the so-called Kurakhove "pocket," remains dire. If Kurakhove

falls, the enemy's focus will shift to Pokrovsk. The nearest enemy positions to Pokrovsk are six kilometers away from the south and east. In the coming months, the occupiers are expected to approach the city from the north, near Hrodivka, and possibly from the southwest, creating conditions for its partial encirclement before launching direct assaults.

Two other critical areas are Toretsk and Chasiv Yar, where battles have been ongoing for several months. Capturing these towns aligns with the enemy's plan to occupy the northern part of the Donetsk region. If Toretsk and Chasiv Yar fall, these enemy groupings will advance toward Kostyantynivka and then the Sloviansk-Kramatorsk agglomeration. To achieve this, Russia must address several difficult objectives north of the agglomeration. The first involves capturing the entire left bank of the Oskil River in the Kupiansk direction, enabling a southward advance with a secured flank. Although Russian forces reached the Oskil banks a month ago, they have been unable to expand this penetration due to Ukrainian counterattacks. The second involves securing a bridgehead near Sviatohirsk and Lyman for an assault on Sloviansk. Meanwhile, the Siverskyi salient remains relatively stable but has seen increased enemy activity recently.

Another hotspot of intense fighting is the Kursk region. Russian and North Korean forces are attacking from multiple directions: northwest, northeast, and southeast. North Korean soldiers have advanced to Mala Loknya and breached Plekhovo, a feat previously unattained by Russian units. Currently, Ukrainian forces control about 45% of the territory they held at their peak in the Kursk region. The Kremlin's deadline for fully expelling Ukrainian forces from this area is March 1, 2025.

Two additional sectors remain critical threats to Ukraine's defenses in the south. Moscow has not abandoned its ambitions to launch offensives in the Zaporizhzhia region and advance toward Kherson. Notably, the enemy is more prepared for an assault on the right bank of the Kherson region than for operations in Zaporizhzhia. A decision to initiate offensive actions in Kherson has already been made.

■ *Military assistance*

The United States intends, as soon as possible and before the end of Joe Biden's presidential term, to transfer the last military aid package to Ukraine. The package includes air defense interceptors and artillery ammunition. The cost of the package will amount to approximately \$1.2 billion.

According to the USAI package, military equipment is purchased from the defense industry or partners, not taken from U.S. stockpiles, meaning its arrival on the battlefield may take months or years. The USAI package could become one of the last steps by the U.S. in providing military support to Ukraine, as U.S. President-elect Donald Trump has publicly questioned military aid and promised to end the war in Ukraine "within 24 hours" after taking office on January 20.

Since Russia's invasion in February 2022, the U.S. has allocated \$175 billion in aid, including about \$61.4 billion for security assistance. Approximately half of this security assistance has been provided through the USAI program, while the rest comes from existing military stockpiles under presidential drawdown authority. The remaining presidential authority for arms reduction amounts to \$5.6 billion. The USAI program has proven beneficial for U.S.

defense contractors, who have received orders for new types of weapons and established new sources of revenue.

According to Reuters, questions remain about how and whether the U.S. will continue to assist its ally without specific USAI funding. On November 27, Biden proposed that Congress approve an additional \$24 billion to strengthen aid to Ukraine. On the same day, WSJ reported that the Biden administration does not have enough time to utilize the billions of dollars allocated by legislators for arming Ukraine. According to the publication, the Pentagon has reached the limit of what it can transfer monthly to Ukraine without harming its own combat capabilities and faces "logistical challenges" in delivering weapons to Ukrainian forces.

At risk are also the \$5.6 billion allocated by Congress for military assistance to Ukraine before Trump's arrival. The U.S. Department of Defense awarded Williams International \$253.7 million. The funds will be spent to increase missile production, particularly under military aid programs for Ukraine. Williams will begin producing more gas-turbine engines, which will increase the production of precision-strike weapons and unmanned systems.

This includes:

- Harpoon anti-ship missiles,
- AGM-158 JASSM air-to-surface missiles,
- AGM-158C LRASM long-range anti-ship missiles,
- Tomahawk cruise missiles, and other precision-strike weapons.

The Pentagon states that funds will be spent under the 2024 Additional Appropriations Act for Indo-Pacific security and the 2024 Additional Appropriations Act for Ukraine security.

Germany is delivering another batch of weapons and equipment to Ukraine. According to the published list, the package includes air defense systems: IRIS-T SLM surface-to-air missile system and missiles for it, IRIS-T SLS surface-to-air missile system (consisting of two launchers), two PATRIOT launchers, two GEPARD anti-aircraft tanks with spare parts and ammunition, two TRML-4D air surveillance radars, and AIM-9L/I-1 Sidewinder guided missiles.

Also delivered: 15 LEOPARD 1 A5 tanks with spare parts and ammunition, 30 armored mine-resistant vehicles (MRAPs), one PzH 2000 self-propelled howitzer with spare parts, and ammunition for the LEOPARD 2 main battle tank. Seven Caracal landing vehicles, five AMPS helicopter self-defense systems, 45 jet skis, and a border patrol vehicle are also included in the package.

Additionally, the package includes 4.3 million rounds of small arms ammunition, 52,000 155mm shells, 20,000 40mm shells, 15,000 120mm mortar rounds, 4,580 anti-tank mines, 120 GMW automatic grenade launchers, 200 MG4 machine guns, 420 MK 556 assault rifles, 90 HLR 338 sniper rifles, and 314,000 rounds of ammunition for them, and 100 CR 308 rifles.

The package also includes drones of various purposes: 30 VECTOR reconnaissance drones with spare parts, 24 RQ-35 HEIDRUN reconnaissance drones, and 14 HORNET XR reconnaissance drones. Additionally included are emergency generators, 50 tents, tourniquets, and demining equipment.

■ *Russia: External and internal challenges*

Trend: *Fans of trading Ukraine's territory to please Putin for peace in Europe*

Donald Trump has repeatedly stated that he is capable of ending the war between Russia and Ukraine "**within 24 hours**" as soon as he becomes president, or even earlier. In October, speaking in Pennsylvania, he emphasized that he has a good relationship with Volodymyr Zelensky and expressed hope that the war would end before his election as president: "Biden has done nothing in this regard — he hasn't even spoken to Putin in over a year. This war must end, and I will make it happen... I am going to end this war as president."

In the debates with Kamala Harris, Trump stated: "I want the war to stop, I want to save lives. People are dying by the millions, and these numbers are much higher than you're being told. America is spending billions. Biden doesn't have the strength to make Europe pay — if you don't pay, you don't get protection." He also emphasized that the current U.S. President, Joe Biden, "doesn't know how to negotiate with Putin" or how to end the war in Ukraine.

However, Trump has never specified the exact actions he plans to take to quickly end the conflict. Many American and European politicians fear that his victory in the elections could lead to a reduction or cessation of American support for Ukraine. **Others believe Trump might try to force Kyiv into negotiations with Russia under unfavorable conditions for Ukraine. The most likely scenario is an attempt to freeze the war, effectively recognizing the occupied territories as Russian in exchange for securing Moscow's support in countering Beijing.**

At the same time, Donald Trump's ally, J.D. Vance, who is set to become the Vice President of the United States, urged Ukraine to relinquish part of its territories to achieve peace with Russia. Speaking on News Nation, Vance stated that Ukrainians would likely have to make this decision, as the country has been significantly depleted by the war. He noted that such ideas are already surfacing in conversations with Ukrainian officials, particularly in informal discussions. According to him, Ukrainian representatives acknowledge that the war cannot go on indefinitely, as Ukraine faces shortages of personnel, weapons, and financial resources.

Vance emphasized that Russia should not have invaded Ukraine but pointed out that both sides of the conflict are seeking its end. He believes the U.S. should act as a mediator and foster genuine diplomacy by asking both Russia and Ukraine what is needed for peace. Meanwhile, long-standing European pro-Putin figure Viktor Orbán is promoting the idea of a "Christmas truce," largely for his own political self-promotion and an attempt to bolster his international influence. He is positioning himself as a potential mediator in future negotiations, especially considering Hungary's controversial presidency of the European Union.

The likelihood of this idea being coordinated with Donald Trump seems low, as Trump aims to be the sole peacemaker and is generally unwilling to share this role. On the other hand, some coordination between Orbán and the Kremlin appears more plausible. **Orbán's actions resemble the tactics of Medvedchuk in the past, where an image of peacemakers was constructed while Ukraine was placed in a disadvantageous position.** This current initiative appears aimed at portraying Kyiv as unwilling even to consider a temporary

truce. It may be an attempt to discredit President Volodymyr Zelensky in the eyes of his international partners, including Trump.

The reality is that a ceasefire cannot be one-sided or based solely on political declarations. Ukraine's experience demonstrates that any truces are quickly violated by Russia. Orbán's proposal is a mere simulation aimed at influencing public opinion and exploiting the situation for manipulative purposes. Given the provocative and pro-Russian nature of such initiatives, Orbán is not perceived by Ukraine or its partners as a neutral mediator but rather as a tool of the Kremlin. This straightforward and comprehensive assessment is provided by political scientist Volodymyr Fesenko.⁴

Robert Fico and Viktor Orbán are displaying a desire to maintain ties with Russia, hoping to gain its favor after the war against Ukraine ends. Political scientist Ihor Reiterovych notes that Fico, like Orbán, pursues pragmatic goals related to access to cheap Russian energy resources and potential benefits such as loans and investments from the Kremlin. This approach stems from a desire to bolster their political power and economic gains for their countries, even if it raises ethical concerns. Slovakia, according to the expert, has long enjoyed favorable conditions for energy supplies from Russia and does not want to relinquish this advantage despite the war in Ukraine.

Fico has previously shown readiness to cooperate with Moscow. Archived data reveal that in 2013, he proposed handing over Slovak assets to Vladimir Putin. Fico's recent visit to Moscow only underscores his intent to strengthen ties with the Kremlin, which has drawn criticism from experts and the international community.⁵

As for the "Christmas ceasefire," it is important to understand that a **unilateral ceasefire is unrealistic.** Ukraine has bitter experience with numerous attempts to negotiate ceasefires, particularly within the framework of the Minsk agreements, which typically lasted only a short time and were violated by the opposing side. Even for a temporary ceasefire, clear agreements are needed regarding its start, duration, and monitoring mechanisms. Orbán's proposal, on the other hand, appears as a propaganda imitation of peace. Putin, commenting on this initiative, stated that he "may consider it," but did not give direct approval. This could indicate a planned maneuver. Had Ukraine agreed, Putin would likely have set his conditions, such as demanding the transfer of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. This would have made Ukraine appear weak, while Putin would continue to dictate the terms.

Orbán is playing into Russia's hands with his actions, acting as a tool of the Kremlin. His proposals are pushing Ukraine toward concessions that benefit only Moscow. Such a position makes Orbán unacceptable as a mediator, not only for Ukraine but also for its European partners. His initiatives are provocative and aimed at discrediting Ukraine by creating the illusion that Kyiv is unwilling to even consider temporary peace.

According to sources, Donald Trump is considering several plans for resolving the war in Ukraine, including freezing the current frontline and delaying Ukraine's NATO membership for 20 years. This plan suggests that the United States will supply Ukraine with a large

⁴ Провокація від Орбана: чим Путіну може бути корисним різдвяне перемир'я.23.12.2024. <https://focus.ua/uk/opinions/685051-nikomu-ne-potribne-rizdvyane-peremir-ya-navishcho-yogo-pridumav-orban-i-chomu-vono-shozhe-na-provokaciyu>

⁵ Катаються в Кремль не просто так: що насправді хочуть отримати Орбан і Фіцо за свої послуги.23.12.2024. <https://world.comments.ua/ua/news/eu/katayutsya-v-kreml-ne-prosto-tak-scho-naspravdi-hochut-otrimati-orban-i-fico-za-svoi-poslugi-753116.html>

amount of weapons to deter further Russian aggression but will not participate in the creation or funding of a buffer zone. According to Trump's campaign sources, the goal is to start peace talks before he officially takes office. Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that he is unaware of the details of this initiative and has not discussed it with Trump.

Donald Trump's statements about the possibility of ending the war between Russia and Ukraine within 24 hours raise doubts about his grasp of reality, particularly given his approach to dealing with Putin. Such initiatives risk leading to unnecessary concessions that will not bring lasting peace but will instead embolden the Kremlin's aggressive ambitions. With such aspirations, Trump does not promise to restore the West's greatness but rather accelerates its decline.

Similar views, echoed by European leaders like Viktor Orbán, cannot be regarded as serious diplomatic efforts. They appear manipulative, potentially putting Ukraine at a disadvantage and discrediting it in the eyes of its international partners. Even a temporary ceasefire without adequate security guarantees for Ukraine would be a mistake. Past experience demonstrates that Russia has consistently violated agreements and fundamentally rejects integration with the West or Europe, perceiving them as existential enemies. Figures like Fico and Orbán are seen as short-sighted individuals easily ensnared by Moscow's strategies.

Proposals to freeze the conflict or delay Ukraine's NATO membership are equally unappealing, as they allow Russia to retain control over parts of Ukrainian territory and leave Ukraine without strategic guarantees. In this context, it is essential to emphasize that peace without security assurances for Ukraine is neither sustainable nor conducive to stability in Europe. Concessions to Moscow for the sake of other nations' foreign policy interests could have catastrophic consequences for regional security and the global order.