

Meeting in Istanbul: The Kremlin's maximalist demands

Marek Menkiszak, Witold Rodkiewicz

On 2 June, a second meeting between Russian and Ukrainian delegations took place in Istanbul, as part of negotiations initiated by the Donald Trump administration to bring the war to an end. During the talks, both sides exchanged their respective terms for a ceasefire. The Russian memorandum consists of three parts: principles for a peaceful settlement, terms for a ceasefire, and the order of proceedings.

Russia outlined its ceasefire terms in two variants. The first requires Ukrainian forces to withdraw from the entirety of the four oblasts formally annexed by Russia (Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia). The second includes a wide range of measures, such as a ban on Ukrainian military movements (except for withdrawal to a mutually agreed distance from the Russian border), an end to mobilisation and the start of demobilisation of Ukraine's armed forces, a halt to all foreign military assistance to Ukraine, guarantees that Ukraine will refrain from sabotage and subversive activities, mutual amnesty for political prisoners, the lifting of martial law in Ukraine, the announcement of presidential and parliamentary elections (to take place no later than 100 days after martial law is lifted), and the signing of an agreement on the implementation of the peace terms outlined in the first part of the document. These include 12 provisions concerning the recognition of Russia's annexations, Ukraine's neutral and non-nuclear status, its demilitarisation, the protection of the rights of the Russian-speaking population, and the lifting of sanctions imposed on Russia (see Annex below for further details).

The peace terms presented by the Russian side indicate that Moscow is adhering to its maximalist demands towards Ukraine. Its aim is to create the appearance of goodwill in order to avoid the imposition of new US sanctions. By putting forward terms that are unacceptable to Ukraine, Russia is seeking to derail the talks and to discourage President Trump from maintaining limited US support for Ukraine. The longer-term goal is to maximise the chances of realising Moscow's aggressive plans, primarily through military means.

Commentary

- Russia's conditions represent a repetition – albeit in a shorter and more general form – of those it put forward during the negotiations with Ukraine in Istanbul in the spring of 2022 (see '[Winning the war with Russia \(is still possible\). The West's counter-strategy towards Moscow](#)'). However, they now include an expanded set of demands concerning Ukraine's domestic policy, such as the requirement to hold elections. As with the seven-point list of peace conditions announced by Vladimir Putin in June 2024 (see '[The capitulation of Ukraine and the Finlandisation of Europe: Russia's threats and 'offers'](#)'), the

latest terms also incorporate Russia's occupation of most of the territory across four Ukrainian oblasts.

- The most significant aspect of Russia's demands is its rejection of an unconditional ceasefire – proposed by both the Trump administration and Ukraine – as a starting point for further negotiations to resolve the conflict. Moscow has made any ceasefire contingent on Ukraine's prior acceptance of its peace terms.
- The principles for a settlement put forward by Russia would effectively strip Ukraine of its sovereignty by imposing significant constraints on both its foreign policy (neutrality, a ban on joining alliances, and engaging in military cooperation with third countries) and its domestic policy (including language and religious policy, and a ban on so-called 'nationalist' parties). Particularly striking is the demand to guarantee the full rights, freedoms, and interests of ethnic Russians and so-called Russian-speaking individuals, as this would open the door to permanent interference in Ukraine's internal affairs. For these reasons, the Russian demands are unacceptable to Ukraine and the Western countries that support it.
- At first glance, Russia's proposed ceasefire terms appear to offer Ukraine a choice between two variants; the first of these is limited to the withdrawal of Ukrainian forces from the four oblasts formally annexed by Russia. However, the third part of the Russian memorandum – which outlines the subsequent procedural steps to follow – in fact links the ceasefire to both the withdrawal of Ukrainian forces and the implementation of the aforementioned broader package of conditions. It further stipulates that both processes must be completed within 30 days.
- The Russian document confirms that Moscow is not interested in seeking a compromise to end the war with Ukraine. Instead, it aims to create a façade of goodwill and willingness to negotiate in order to avoid further US sanctions. It is relying on President Trump to attribute the lack of progress in peace talks to Ukraine and to suspend all forms of US support, particularly intelligence cooperation.

APPENDIX. Russian peace terms (translation of part one of the document)

Key parameters for the final settlement of the conflict:

1. International legal recognition of the incorporation of Crimea, the DPR (Donetsk People's Republic), the LPR (Luhansk People's Republic), and the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts into the Russian Federation; and the complete withdrawal of the AFU (Armed Forces of Ukraine) and other Ukrainian armed formations from these territories;
2. Declaration of neutrality by Ukraine, entailing a commitment not to join military alliances or coalitions, and a prohibition on military activities by third countries on Ukrainian territory, including the deployment of foreign armed forces, military bases, or military infrastructure;
3. Termination of international treaties and agreements that conflict with point 2 of this section, and a ban on entering into such agreements in future;

4. Re-affirmation of Ukraine's status as a non-nuclear state, with no possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and the establishment of a direct prohibition on their introduction, transit, or deployment on Ukrainian territory;
5. The establishment of maximum troop levels for the AFU and other Ukrainian armed formations, quantitative and qualitative limits on weapons and military equipment; and the disbandment of Ukrainian nationalist units within the AFU and National Guard;
6. Guarantee of the full rights, freedoms, and interests of the Russian and Russian-speaking population; and the granting of Russian as an official language;
7. A statutory ban on the glorification and promotion of Nazism and neo-Nazism; and the disbandment of nationalist organisations and political parties;
8. The lifting of all existing economic sanctions, bans, and restrictive measures between the Russian Federation and Ukraine; and a commitment not to introduce new ones;
9. Resolution of a range of issues related to family unifications and displaced persons;
10. Renunciation of mutual claims for damages resulting from military actions;
11. Removal of all restrictions on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP);
12. Gradual restoration of diplomatic and economic relations (including gas transit), as well as transport and other forms of cooperation, including with third countries.