

Pax Ukrainica. Ukraine's hopes and expectations ahead of the summit in Switzerland

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Much of Ukrainian diplomacy's activity has been focused on efforts to persuade the world that it should support an end to the war with Russia on Ukraine's terms. Since November 2022, Ukraine has primarily pursued this goal by promoting Volodymyr Zelensky's Peace Formula, which consists of 10 points representing Ukrainian demands directly related to the ongoing conflict: the complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territory, Russia's recognition of the inviolability of Ukraine's borders, punishing those guilty of war crimes, and launching international action in the face of the threats with possible global consequences that exist in Ukraine. These include ensuring the safety of nuclear energy in the light of Russia's occupation of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, and guaranteeing Ukrainian food exports via the Black Sea.

Since the Formula was launched, the organisation of a Global Peace Summit (with the participation of heads of state from around the world) has been an integral part of it. This summit is currently scheduled to take place in the Swiss resort of Bürgenstock on Lake Lucerne on 15–16 June; four rounds of coordination meetings have been held in Copenhagen, Jeddah, Malta and Davos as part of the preparations for the event. According to the Swiss government, more than 70 delegations have confirmed that they will participate in the summit, while Ukraine has said that 106 delegations will attend, including officials from France, Germany, India, South Korea, the European Union and the Council of Europe. Despite Ukrainian hopes, President Joe Biden will not come to Switzerland; instead, Vice President Kamala Harris will represent the US. China has refused to participate in the initiative.

Despite the Ukrainian government's initial announcements, the summit will not be the final, crowning event of the talks on Zelensky's Formula, but will in fact be just the first of two (or more) meetings involving world leaders. Moreover, its agenda will be trimmed down to three non-controversial items: ensuring nuclear security; securing food supplies; and returning Ukrainian children from Russia and exchanging prisoners of war. Ukraine is keen to ensure the broadest possible participation by foreign heads of state in the summit so it can be used as evidence of their support for resolving the conflict on Ukraine's terms and help to deepen Russia's international isolation.



Ukraine is not enough

Since Zelensky announced his Peace Formula¹ in its full form, the government in Kyiv has sought to make this initiative universal, portraying it as a future model for resolving other conflicts around the world, both current and potential.² According to this vision, any state can join the discussions on its individual points and participate in developing the relevant mechanisms under international law. This is intended to encourage those countries that do not fully support the Ukrainian conditions for ending the war with Russia but are interested in discussing selected issues to join the initiative. Work on the Formula is expected to produce a consensus on the final two issues listed in it: the creation of an international security mechanism and the conclusion of an agreement to end the war with Russia. According to the Ukrainian president, this would become the foundation for “upgrading the security architecture for Ukraine, and for Europe and the world, which will not allow any more aggression.”³

In addition to outlining these proposals the Ukrainian government has criticised the UN in its current form, as a structure that is inca-

” Ukraine has portrayed the Peace Formula as an alternative to the ineffective decision-making procedures at the UN.

pable of solving global problems and therefore needs thorough reform.⁴ It has portrayed the Peace Formula as an initiative based on the UN Charter, but free from the limitations related to the possible exercise of the veto by the Security Council’s permanent members. On the one hand, this promotion of the Formula is designed to give international publicity to the Ukrainian initiative; on the other, it is aimed at undermining the Russian Federation’s status as a permanent member of the Security Council which can block its decisions. In December 2022 Ukraine’s foreign ministry sought to strip Russia of its seat on the Council, arguing that Russia had assumed it after the Soviet Union’s collapse in contravention of procedures. However, these efforts failed to generate much publicity or international support.

The long road to the summit

The concept of the Peace Formula envisages the organisation of a global peace summit at which participants would adopt a joint statement endorsing individual (but preferably all) points contained in the Formula. Initially, Ukraine had high hopes of holding such a summit in New York on the invasion’s first anniversary on 24 February 2023. In the end, it abandoned this idea and settled for a vote during a special session of the UN General Assembly on a resolution condemning the Russian aggression, which included general references to the Formula. This decision was most likely influenced by a Chinese-Russian diplomatic offensive which promoted an alternative peace proposal to the Ukrainian

¹ President Zelensky presented the initial outline of his Formula during a speech before the UN General Assembly in September 2022, and then at a meeting with the G7 countries in October that year. This included five points: punishing Russia for the crime of aggression, providing Ukraine with any assistance necessary to protect life, restoring its territorial integrity, obtaining security guarantees, and mobilising the international community to exercise the right to defence.

² The formula encompasses 10 broad issues: 1) ensuring nuclear security by making Russian forces leave the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, 2) guaranteeing food supplies by extending the area covered by the grain agreement that allows Ukrainian food to be transported across the Black Sea, 3) ensuring energy security by providing Ukraine with military means to protect its energy facilities, 4) releasing all prisoners of war and deportees from the occupied territories, 5) forcing Russia to recognise Ukraine’s territorial integrity, 6) ensuring the complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territory, 7) bringing those guilty of war crimes in Ukraine before a special tribunal and obtaining compensation from Russia for war losses, 8) restoring the environmental losses incurred during the Russian invasion, 9) creating an international mechanism to guarantee Ukraine’s security, 10) signing an agreement to end the war.

³ ‘Speech by the President of Ukraine at the General Debate of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly’, President of Ukraine, 22 September 2022, [president.gov.ua](https://www.president.gov.ua).

⁴ During his speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2023, President Zelensky proposed a reform to the UN introducing a procedure for overriding the veto of a Security Council member through a vote by a two-thirds majority of the UN General Assembly. In addition to this, he called for the Security Council’s composition to be expanded in order to “reflect the current realities and justice” and the creation of an early-response mechanism to prevent acts of aggression by any state. See ‘Застосування права вето потребує реформування, і це може стати ключовою реформою ООН – виступ Президента України на засіданні Ради Безпеки ООН’, President of Ukraine, 20 September 2023, [president.gov.ua](https://www.president.gov.ua).

one and was aimed at undermining it.⁵ However, the vote to adopt the resolution was a success for Ukraine: 141 countries supported the document unequivocally condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and demanded that "the Russian Federation immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders", with only seven voting against (Russia, Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua and Syria) and 32 abstaining (including China, India, Pakistan, Cuba, Iran, Kazakhstan, Armenia, South Africa).⁶

Other dates for the summit that Ukrainian officials mentioned (July 2023,⁷ the autumn of 2023,⁸ February 2024⁹) were also missed as the expected international support for the Formula failed to materialise.¹⁰

In this situation Ukraine decided to hold additional meetings of security advisors, heads of state and other senior officials to discuss the Formula's other points in special working groups. Four such meetings were held between June 2023 and January 2024 in Copenhagen, Jeddah, Malta and Davos. While the Ukrainian government had originally hoped for one general meeting attended by world leaders, it eventually opted to hold two (or more) summits. The decision to reschedule the conference and modify the way in which it was organised was intended to raise the international community's interest in the initiative and prepare the political ground for endorsing the final provisions of the planned Global Peace Summit.

In the end, the Ukrainian government decided to hold the summit on 15–16 June in Bürgenstock, in coordination with Switzerland and with its diplomatic support.

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The event will address only three points of the Ukrainian plan: ensuring nuclear security; securing food supplies; and returning Ukrainian children from Russia and exchanging prisoners of war. Ukraine has scaled down its ambitions due to the difficulties in getting all the invited participants to agree on the Formula's other points. Thus the talks will only deal with issues that have generated little controversy or disagreement, while leaving out the fundamental matters for which the Formula had originally been initiated: forcing Russia to recognise the territorial integrity of Ukraine, ensuring the complete withdrawal of Russian troops, bringing those guilty of war crimes before a special tribunal, and obtaining compensation for war losses.

'For our decolonisation and yours'

For the Ukrainian peace initiative to become truly global, it is crucial to persuade the countries of the Global South to participate in it. However, the Ukrainian government has faced considerable difficulties in its efforts to gain support in South America and Africa for its war against Russia. Back in July 2022, President Zelensky was denied the opportunity to address the summit of Mercosur, an organisation that includes Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. In June 2023 in Kyiv, he met a delegation of seven African countries which handed him a plan for ending the war that did not include Ukraine's

⁵ See M. Bogusz, K. Nieczytor, 'China's diplomatic game over the 'peace plan'', OSW, 24 February 2023, osw.waw.pl.

⁶ 'UN General Assembly calls for immediate end to war in Ukraine', United Nations, 23 February 2023, news.un.org.

⁷ 'Зеленський хоче проведення у липні саміту формули миру', Європейська правда, 21 May 2023, euromaidanpress.com.

⁸ '«Саміт миру» по Україні може пройти до кінця року — високопосадовець ЄС', Новини Донбасу, 26 June 2023, novosti.dn.ua.

⁹ T. Balmforth, 'Ukraine says global 'peace summit' may take place next year', Reuters, 9 November 2023, reuters.com.

¹⁰ In an online address to the European Council in March 2023, President Zelensky complained that European countries had been dragging their feet on implementing Ukraine's Peace Formula and announcing their participation in the peace summit. See 'Президент України виступив у онлайн-форматі на засіданні Європейської ради та розповів про п'ять ключових причин затягування війни й віддалення миру', President of Ukraine, 23 September 2023, president.gov.ua.

key demands, such as withdrawing Russian forces from its territory, paying reparations to Ukraine, and bringing to justice those responsible for the Russian invasion.¹¹

Ukraine's efforts to persuade the countries of the Global South to endorse its vision for ending the conflict have been significantly hampered by the intense Russian propaganda in this part of the world. Its impact has been reinforced by the years-long tradition of contacts between some countries on both continents, and the longstanding political and military presence of first the Soviet Union and then Russia.¹² In particular, Ukraine felt Russia's diplomatic advantage during the Moscow-initiated blockade of its Black Sea ports. At that time, in many African and South American countries Russian diplomacy initially succeeded in placing the blame on Ukraine for the spectre of global famine.

The Russian narrative is in sync with the one that China has been disseminating in these regions, according to which any summit

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organised by Ukraine without Russia's participation has to be seen as pointless and unproductive. In President Zelensky's view, Russia has also resorted to blackmailing certain countries with threats to withhold supplies of food, agricultural goods and chemicals, and to raise prices for energy supplies if they attend the Global Peace Summit. He has made similar comments about China's efforts to actively discourage the leaders of some countries from participating in the summit. As a result, many African and South American countries have adopted a neutral stance towards the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, which has been reflected in their abstention from votes at the UN to condemn Russia, their refusal to join the West's policy of sanctions against Russia, and their reluctance to become involved in the Ukrainian peace initiative. So far, the governments of China, Brazil, South Africa and Saudi Arabia have all reportedly refused to attend the summit.

In response, the Ukrainian government has embarked on an intensive diplomatic effort to counter Russian influence. In January 2022, the Ukrainian foreign ministry adopted a strategy to develop relations with African countries, followed two years later by a communication strategy towards African countries and a strategy to develop relations with Latin American countries; the contents of these have not been made public. In July 2022, President Zelensky appointed a Special Representative of Ukraine for the Middle East and Africa. His government has also doubled the number of diplomatic missions in Africa (it opened seven embassies in 2023 and 2024: in Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Mozambique, Botswana, Rwanda and Mauritania), and announced that it would establish another three in Africa (in Tanzania, Cameroon and Sudan) and five in South America (in Colombia, Panama, Guyana, Paraguay and Uruguay).

These personnel and normative steps have been accompanied by increased diplomatic activity. In 2022–23, Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba embarked on as many as four 'tours' of African countries; a large number of these (including those to Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Kenya) marked the first time that a Ukrainian diplomatic official had ever travelled to these nations. In December 2023, President Zelensky attended the swearing-in ceremony for Argentina's president Javier Milei, using it as an opportunity to meet with the leaders of countries such as Ecuador, Paraguay and Uruguay. In May 2023, Kuleba attended a summit of the Association of Caribbean States in Guatemala, which was attended by officials from 25 South American and Caribbean countries. Ukraine's talks in Africa and South America have followed the same *modus operandi*: Ukrainian officials have been trying

¹¹ See M. Bartosiewicz, K. Nieczydor, 'Grain comes first: the African peace initiative for Ukraine', OSW, 21 June 2023, osw.waw.pl.

¹² See M. Bartosiewicz, 'Russian diplomacy is more active in Africa than ever', OSW, 9 June 2023, osw.waw.pl.

to convince their counterparts that Russia has pursued an imperial policy akin to the one that the former Western powers once followed on these continents. They have thus argued that Ukraine and these countries share common experiences, and have similar aspirations to become fully independent from their former colonial powers.

The war for peace

Russia has rejected the solutions contained in the Formula. From the outset, it has downplayed the significance of the Ukrainian initiative: in May, Vladimir Putin called it unrealistic and unworthy of discussion. Nevertheless Ukraine's moves have unsettled the Kremlin, forcing it to take steps aimed at countering the initiative. In recent months, it has launched an information campaign to undermine the idea of holding a summit without Russia's participation, as well as a disinformation campaign falsely claiming that the Ukrainian delegation agreed to the contours of a peace agreement during negotiations in Belarus and Turkey in March and April 2022. The Kremlin has alleged that at that time the prospect of a compromise was dashed by European politicians who advised Ukraine to reject Russia's proposal. In this way, Russia has been trying to convince the international community that Ukraine is not sovereign, and is being forced by the West to continue the conflict.

At the same time Russia has portrayed itself as constantly ready for peace talks, insisting that these should be based on an agreement that was allegedly reached in March/April 2022 while taking into account the 'new reality' stemming partly from Russia's formal annexation of four Ukrainian regions.¹³ Russia has been working to undermine the summit's political significance by claiming that Zelensky is no longer Ukraine's legitimate president after his five-year term expired.¹⁴ In addition, Russia is aiming to reduce the global public's interest in the Swiss summit by holding a meeting of foreign ministers of the BRICS member states at the same time.

Ukraine for its part wants to ensure that the summit is an event with the highest profile, and expects the most important world leaders to attend, as this would

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give added weight to any agreements that will be reached there. In a special address, Zelensky explicitly called on President Joe Biden and China's leader Xi Jinping to attend the meeting and endorse the Ukrainian initiative. Ukraine also hopes that narrowing the thematic scope of the first summit to the least controversial issues will help it raise attendance. At the same time, the Formula's provisions that unequivocally condemn the Russian Federation and envisage the complete restoration of the *status quo ante* reflect Ukraine's belief in its political, international legal and moral rights to determine the form and terms of bringing an end to its war with Russia. Ukrainian decision-makers are not considering abandoning or scaling down their demands, which demonstrates the continued determination of the country's political elite to resolve the conflict on their own terms.

The failure of the Ukrainian counter-offensive in 2023 and the subsequent Russian gains on the battlefield have proved to be further significant obstacles to mobilising the international community and political elites to attend the summit and endorse the Ukrainian terms for ending the war. These difficulties have been compounded by Russia's stated readiness to wage a long conflict, as demonstrated by its successive offensive military operations in Ukraine and its hybrid warfare against the West.

¹³ See W. Rodkiewicz, M. Menkiszak, P. Żochowski, 'Russia is hoodwinking the West about peace negotiations with Ukraine', OSW, 15 April 2024, osw.waw.pl.

¹⁴ See M. Jędrzyak, 'President until the end of the war. Volodymyr Zelensky's term of office is extended', OSW, 20 May 2024, osw.waw.pl.

This has weakened the motivation of the countries in the Global South and the West to continue their support, and reinforced their fears of incurring political and reputational costs in the event of a Russian victory. As a result, global leaders are increasingly adopting a wait-and-see attitude and are wary of taking sides unequivocally. For this reason, it is reasonable to assume that the summit in Switzerland will only provide an opportunity for Ukraine to keep the topic of Russian invasion high on the international political agenda, rather than to rally the world around the endorsement of the Formula's key points.