INTERVIEWS 01.12.2025

‘The willingness to compromise has risen steadily’

Felix Hett on the Ukrainian perception of Trump’s peace plan and the likelihood of its success

How would you describe the current political mood in Ukraine, especially against the backdrop of discussions about peace negotiations and the military situation on the front line?

Trump’s ‘peace plan’ hits Ukraine at its weakest point since the invasion began in February 2022. Four crises are converging: the front line appears increasingly unstable in light of the mobilisation crisis. Even before the onset of winter, massive Russian shelling triggered an energy crisis with regular power cuts. If the European Council does not decide on 18/19 December to use Russian assets for Ukraine, there is a threat of a financial crisis —the coverage of the 2026 national budget is then unclear. And these three crises are exacerbated by the crisis of confidence at home and abroad triggered by the current corruption scandal in President Zelenskyy’s immediate circle.

How is the American 28-point plan and the subsequent proposals being perceived in Ukraine?

The 28 points have been widely criticised in the media. This is understandable: Ukraine has not been defending Donbass since 2014 in order to now vacate it without a fight. However, there are also comments that concede that the deal on offer is not the worst of all the currently poor options available to Ukraine. After all, it contains US security guarantees, albeit very vaguely worded. And it wants to use Russian funds for reconstruction. The EU perspective remains intact. The question is: does Ukraine have any prospect of a better way out of the war if it continues to fight for another six months or a year? The answer is not clear-cut. Interestingly, it is voices from the military and nationalist circles that are calling for a freeze on the war. However, it is also clear that the 28 points were the US’ entry into negotiations, they are currently being coordinated with Ukraine, and then still have to be negotiated with Russia.

The corruption scandal in the country continues to spread, and the pressure on Volodymyr Zelenskyy is mounting. On Friday, Zelenskyy's chief of staff and right-hand man, Andriy Yermak, resigned as a result of corruption investigations against him. How badly has the Ukrainian president been affected?

Yermak and Zelenskyy were considered to have a very close relationship. In 2021, Zelenskyy said of him, 'He came with me, and he will leave with me.' None of Yermak's predecessors since 1991 has headed the presidential office for as long as he has – almost six years. His departure thus marks a turning point on the surface. But it cannot be ruled out that he will continue to exert considerable informal influence. The corruption scandal involving Timur Mindich shows once again that in Ukraine, you don't need a formal office to be powerful. At the same time, Zelenskyy runs the risk that the next revelation from the anti-corruption office NABU will affect him personally. According to its own statements, NABU has so far published only a fraction of the wiretapped conversations.

Ukraine is likely to face bitter concessions in the course of a peace agreement. How likely is it that Zelenskyy will be able to pass a painful compromise through parliament?

It is unclear whether a peace agreement would have to be ratified by parliament or even by referendum. That also depends on the nature of the deal: de facto recognition of the loss of territory does not imply a formal legal act on the part of Ukraine. There is speculation that Zelenskyy does not want to bear the decision alone, but would like to spread it across several shoulders, which is probably politically wise.

Many experts – including in Germany – are sceptical about a possible peace deal with Putin. Putin cannot be trusted, they say, and such an agreement would lay the groundwork for another Russian attack in the future. How is this viewed in Ukraine?

Similarly. But on the one hand, it is becoming increasingly clear that there is no optimal solution, no guarantees and no 100 per cent certainty, only painful compromises. On the other hand, Ukraine needs a respite: even if war were to break out again in a year or two, at least we would now have a chance to rest, that is how I would describe the mood among some people. Ultimately, there is no trust on either side; Kyiv does not trust Moscow, nor does the Kremlin want to rely on Ukrainian promises. However, that is normal in wars. And it highlights how important international mediation is.

What is the mood in Ukrainian society regarding a possible negotiated

peace? Under what conditions, if any, would the population be willing to accept such a plan?

According to opinion polls, the willingness to compromise has risen steadily in recent months. Far-reaching concessions such as formal territorial relinquishment are generally rejected by a majority. But as early as August, over 80 per cent of respondents were in favour of seeking a compromise through negotiations, and only 11 per cent were in favour of continuing to fight until all territories were liberated. In 2023, before Ukraine's failed counteroffensive, 60 per cent had still voted for the latter. Ultimately, I would not underestimate the willingness of any society to compromise. The question is what Ukraine will get in exchange for concessions. If it is peace and economic development, acceptance for these will also increase.

This interview was conducted by Nikolaos Gavalakis.



Felix Hett

Felix Hett heads the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung offices in Ukraine and Moldova. Previously, he was director of the South Caucasus Regional Office.