

# Ukraine and steps on the road to peace: What compromise are we prepared to make to save lives in the Donbas?

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Only the lazy aren't talking about the need to stop the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO). The speediest possible halt to the armed conflict has even become even the official position of the Ukrainian authorities. The issue, however, is that some people see the halt to the ATO coming with the ultimate victory of the Ukrainian government's army, which at this moment has a clear advantage in numbers and arms. In our view, such a "victory" is not possible right now without massive civilian casualties in the region. And even if it is achieved, it will lead to the growth of a completely justifiable hatred on the part of the local population not just towards the pro-government army but in general to the Ukrainian state itself.

A Ukrainian authority established by way of terror will not be strong and will never be accepted by the eastern Ukrainians as their own. But it is precisely down this path that extremists on both sides of the conflict are pushing us. In the end this particular path leads to the complete loss of faith in these regions in Ukrainian state institutions and the de facto disintegration of the contemporary Ukrainian state. This is precisely the scenario that anti-Ukrainian forces want to see; they want to prove above all the incapacity of the contemporary Ukrainian state and the inability of Ukrainians to exist as a political nation.

Armed confrontation taking place right now around Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and other cities of the Donbas bring civilian casualties every night. You will find no writing on each piece of shrapnel that has wounded or killed a civilian just who set that mine. However these mines are continually exploding very close to residential quarters; they systematically get them inside occupied buildings, although of course in most cases they are not intended to hit peaceful residents. One can readily believe that ATO forces have on no occasions fired directly at residential buildings, however in a densely populated place in the Donbas it is impossible to avoid accidental casualties altogether. In the same way one could argue over whether the armed formations of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics are directing their mortar fire at residential buildings or not. The fact remains that mines are getting into them, and most likely from both sides of the conflict.

Therefore the first demand that conscious Ukrainian citizens should make is an immediate ceasefire. An immediate cessation in the use of heavy weapons and air forces on both sides in populated centres. The first task to be agreed, if necessary with the devil, is to prevent casualties among the civilian population, people who have now become hostages of the terrorists. In this situation it is simply necessary to conduct negotiations even with those we consider to be the worst terrorists.

Such questions as a ceasefire and creating a humanitarian corridor for the evacuation of civilians and the delivery of humanitarian aid can all be negotiated with, among others, the real "field commanders" of the terrorists – Girkin-Strelkov, Abwehr, Bis, others. On the other hand, any questions concerning political decision making should be considered solely with representatives of the local communities and not with fighters who have come here from abroad.

It is necessary to hold discussions with the representatives of local communities about withdrawing the army from population centres and creating security buffer zones around Ukrainian military encampments. The question can also be raised about returning Ukrainian military units to their permanent bases, but there can be no question about removing all Ukrainian military forces from the territory of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts. Units of the armed forces of Ukraine have been here ever since the armed forces were created, which happened right after we gained our independence. Service men and women with their families have lived here in garrisons and nearby settlements for decades. To demand that these people, most of whom have nothing at all to do with any nationalist organisations, be resettled is absolutely unacceptable.

Negotiations should be conducted in the context of organising open and democratic elections to local councils. In particular a decision will be needed to allow election observers from Ukrainian and international organisations. It's no secret that a significant portion (if not the majority of the urban population) does not trust the Ukrainian army. Naturally, people are frightened and find themselves under the influence of lying Russian propaganda. However, there are also objective reasons for such mistrust. There are many members of Ukrainian ultranationalist and even openly neo-Nazi organisations in the ranks and leadership of newly formed Ukrainian military units. And unfortunately the Government has been relying all the more on such units, which are more inclined to decisive action, which still do not have a clear status or clearly defined authority. The actions of such semi-autonomous battalions are often provocative and tend to consolidate the local population around the terrorist groups, which are then regarded, paradoxically, as their "defenders". Without a doubt an important step on the road to peace in this region would be the removal of these "volunteer" Ukrainian battalions from the territory of Luhansk and Donetsk, their disarmament and disbandment.

It is no secret either that organised workers have until now taken practically no part in the events taking place in this industrial region. At the same time, in places where workers' organisations were bold enough to take the situation under their own control, as happened for example in Krasnodon, Luhansk oblast, the strike committee not only took control of the whole city, but also prevented any violence during its general strike. The independent unions of Kryviy Rih have experience in forming their own self defense brigades. They played an important role in preventing provocations and violence during their protests on the Maidan in the Kryviy Rih Basin.

We think that trade union representatives, which are independent of the oligarch-owners on the one hand and clearly distanced from radical nationalist organisations, both pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian, on the other hand, can also become the guarantors of agreements made between the conflicting sides in the Donbas. Therefore we call upon the independent trade unions and strike committees to form their own self defense brigades and use all acceptable means to bring these sides to an immediate ceasefire. Possibly, workers' delegations from Dnipropetrovsk could become effective mediators in normalising this situation, and be much more helpful in the ATO zone than the Azov and Dnipro (special volunteer) battalions.

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