

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Ukrainian Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation, HC 916

Tuesday 25 November 2025

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Emily Thornberry (Chair); Fleur Anderson; Aphra Brandreth; Phil Brickell; Dan Carden; Richard Foord; Uma Kumaran; Sir John Whittingdale.

Also attended: Oleksandr Merezhko (Chair), Mariya Ionova and Iryna Herashchenko, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

Questions 16 - 35

Witnesses

I: The following representatives of United for Ukraine (U4U) gave evidence: Heikki Autto, Chair, Defence Committee, Parliament of Finland; Pavel Fischer, Chairperson, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security, Senate of the Czech Republic; Agnieszka Pomaska, Chair, European Union Affairs Committee, Sejm of the Republic of Poland; and Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, Chair, Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the European Union, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Heikki Autto, Pavel Fischer, Agnieszka Pomaska and Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze.

Q16 **Chair:** We are very grateful to have you here in front of us today. We have some members of the Ukrainian Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation, and we also have members of the United for Ukraine delegation. Perhaps people will introduce themselves as they speak. To begin, I cannot possibly let this opportunity go by without asking Oleksandr his impressions of what has happened over the past few days and what he makes of the peace proposals from America.

Oleksandr Merezko: I would like to start with an expression of the most sincere and deepest words of gratitude to the people of the United Kingdom and to the King. I have noticed one interesting thing: things definitely started to be better between Ukraine and Trump after his conversation and meeting with King Charles. Perhaps it is coincidence, but to me it was British diplomacy at its best. I believe that it was a very important psychological, diplomatic and political shift in Trump's attitude towards Ukraine.

Chair: He is a bit of a secret weapon, I think.

Oleksandr Merezko: Exactly. Please express my gratitude to the King.

With regard to unfolding events, I will start from the end, because, honestly, I do not think that any peace plans can change anything. I will start with a prediction: Putin, again, will reject this peace plan. He will reiterate his so-called maximalist demands with regard to Ukraine's virtual capitulation and surrender. Nothing will change. Putin needed all this show for only one reason: he is not interested in serious negotiations or even in a ceasefire; he is interested only in buying some time and dodging and evading sanctions against Russia. That was his plan. By coming up with this provocation through Dmitriev and Witkoff, he has been trying to discredit Ukraine. His goal is to discredit Ukraine in the eyes of Trump and to present Ukraine as not wanting peace. We want peace, but we also want life—we want to live. We cannot surrender.

The initial plan, to me, was a huge embarrassment. There is so much confusion about that initial plan of 28 points. I believe that Trump himself had not read the text, because he would never have agreed to it. I understand that luckily, due to negotiations, there have been some changes more in favour of Ukraine, but I have not seen the text. Honestly, though, the text does not matter at all for Putin; he is not interested even in a ceasefire. The best thing we can hope for, and the most optimal way out right now, is to insist on a ceasefire and then on negotiations after the ceasefire, whereas for Putin, it is vice versa. By using our American friends, he wants to make us accept absolutely unacceptable conditions



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that would allow him to destroy us—he virtually demands our surrender—and only after that would he agree to a ceasefire. His logic is different.

Now, we are approaching a very interesting and dangerous moment, because we have this peace plan, it will be presented to Putin, and most likely Putin will reject it again. The big question is: what will Trump do after that? There are two options. Option No. 1 is to deliver on his promise and impose stricter sanctions against Russia and against Russian allies buying Russian oil and gas, including Hungary, of course. That is the most reasonable option. The other option is to use it as an excuse and a pretext to walk away.

Another question that arises is whether Trump will continue to sell weaponry to Ukraine and share intelligence information with us. From the point of view of common sense—and Trump is for common sense, I understand—it is in the interests of the United States to continue to sell weaponry. They are making money on it, and it is in line with their America First philosophy. To share intelligence does not cost anything to the United States. Our goal right now is to do everything we can, because we are walking on eggshells, so to speak. It is very difficult for us. Politically, we are trying not to lose our partner.

Q17 Chair: Is there anything in the peace plan that you think is in any way acceptable?

Oleksandr Merezhko: Yes, absolutely: item No. 1, confirmation of Ukraine's sovereignty. I would just drop all other items.

Chair: That is fairly clear.

Oleksandr Merezhko: You can logically deduce from that principle all the rest. If you read the UN's declaration on principles of international law, adopted by the General Assembly, you see that the principle of sovereign equality implies—it is written in the document—territorial integrity and non-use of force. You can deduce everything. You should be just consistent and logical in your approach. That is what I would do, but of course—

Q18 Chair: I am so sorry to cut across you, but we also have Ivanna here from the United for Ukraine delegation. Ivanna, would you mind giving us your first impressions of the plan and what you think might happen next? It would be very interesting to have your contribution as well. Would you mind introducing yourself first?

Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Honourable Chair, honourable Members of the British Parliament, colleagues—I am very happy to see my colleagues from the Ukrainian Parliament as well—my name is Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze. I am a member of the Ukrainian Parliament representing the European Solidarity party and I have the honour of chairing the Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the EU.

My perception of what is called a "peace plan" is pretty close to the assessment of my colleague Oleksandr Merezhko. I feel that we find



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ourselves invited to walk into a big trap that was set first and foremost for the United States by the Russian Federation. Right now, we are all together trying to sort out things within this trap that we have been invited into by the American Administration.

I am worried that we have not so far been able to press forward our own understanding of how we see, together, the end of this war and get to the point of standing with Ukraine for as long as it takes until the defeat of the Russian Federation. That ending is very important: I underline that what we want as a result of this war is a strategic defeat of the Russian Federation, which would mean that Russia cannot wage another war on any of its neighbours or countries across the globe, and that Russia is so weakened and isolated that it cannot rise again to threaten European and global security, which it is doing right now.

I find it hard to comment on particular points of the plan because none of us—I think you would probably agree—has actually seen specifically what was on the table to be discussed by any of the delegations. We are only judging based on the information available to us through the media—and we are grateful to the media that have been bringing this news to us. Now, we are being informed that there is supposedly another something that has been pre-agreed, with “minor” things left out for further consultation, such as the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

I think the previous 28-point plan did not have anything to do with the first clause, which Oleksandr referred to: protecting the sovereignty of Ukraine. Moreover, it attacked the sovereignty of NATO members, and I assume that NATO members should not agree with that. It seems that Russia and the US were suggesting that you should be deprived of your sovereign decisions on whether Ukraine could at some point become a NATO member, and that you should also give up on your earlier sovereign decisions on the irreversibility of NATO membership for Ukraine.

We have to remember that this war is not about land. This war is not about territories. It is about the subjugation of one nation to another. It is about the extermination of a nation that has held the spirit of freedom and is seen as a threat to stagnating Russia. The success of Ukraine would not be seen as a positive development in the Russian Federation.

The task of this war for the Kremlin is also to ensure that the international order as we know it is blown up, and your security is at stake. Your security is to be undermined by the result of the war that Russia wants to achieve. I do not think that that plan is anything but an insistence on Ukraine’s capitulation, after all the great work that we have done with the brave Ukrainian Armed Forces and the brave Ukrainian society—Ukrainian society has been resolute in the face of this war, which has been difficult for us—together with our partners. We are very grateful that, for the first time in our history, when we are holding the frontline, we are not alone.

It is time to understand that this plan will not lead us to anything that could be called lasting and sustainable peace. If it is agreed, I think that the pause would be used by the Russian Federation as an opportunity to



attack and finally conquer Ukraine, fully subjugate Ukraine to its rule, further extend the powers of the Russian Federation's dictatorial empire, and then go into another wave of not only so-called hybrid attacks—I disagree with that definition, but the attacks that are already happening across the European continent—but direct attacks on our neighbours, partners and allies.

Q19 Chair: Thank you. It is important to hear from the Ukrainians who are here. We talk about battling against difficulties, and the bravery and strength of the Ukrainian character. That is very well illustrated by Iryna's managing to be here with us during a blackout.

Iryna, I wonder whether your sound is good enough. It might be necessary for you to keep your contribution short, but we would like to hear from you, from the blackout, your impression of the peace plan that the President of the United States has proposed.

Iryna Herashchenko: Thank you very much for the UK's leadership and support for Ukraine since 2014, and especially since the full-scale invasion in 2022. I deeply appreciate the UK's assistance, including the training for Ukrainian soldiers.

Mariya Ionova, Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze and I have visited our training centres and our soldiers many times. It is very important now to support the training of our soldiers. Right now, we have a problem with mobilisation and with fatigue on the front, because it has been a very difficult war. It has now lasted 11 years, but my colleagues Oleksandr Merezhko and Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze are right: we cannot capitulate.

All Ukrainian politicians and all Ukrainian people have red lines. The first is Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the second is our identity, which Russia wants to destroy. The number of our military forces is very important.

I was very happy to see my colleague Sharon Hodgson, head of the UK delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and now co-chair of the Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine, a special parliamentary group. In Istanbul, we had very constructive discussions on our work against Russian hybrid attacks: its disinformation, manipulation and exploitation, including its many activities on social media, and so on.

The 28-point plan is not a just peace plan; it is a plan to capitulate. For us, it is very important to have a just peace plan. Without Ukraine there is no plan, and this is a Russian-organised plan without Ukraine.

Chair: We have all just come from the Chamber, where British Prime Minister Keir Starmer was saying that what we need is a just and lasting peace. As has been pointed out, the first line of this proposal talks about Ukrainian sovereignty, but the other points are all really undermining the possibility of Ukrainian sovereignty and Ukraine's ability to make its own decisions and be a free nation. It will not be a lasting peace if Ukraine's very essence is undermined and it is weakened so much that it can be



swallowed by Russia at some time in the future.

Q20 Sir John Whittingdale: I think we were all agreed that the 28-point plan as it was first put forward was wholly unacceptable, for the reasons that Ivanna and Oleksandr have set out very well. However, it now appears, according to media reports, that there may have been the outline of some agreement between America and Russia. We are still getting initial reports of that. We have always been clear that any agreement can only be achieved with Ukraine involved. We cannot allow agreements to be reached without Ukraine being a participant in those talks. Do you think there is scope for an agreement? Does President Zelensky have a vision of what might be possible? If he has a vision of what could be agreed, is there any possibility that Russia would agree to it? Ivanna, it may be easiest if you start.

Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: I think it would be right for Oleksandr to respond first, as chair of the Ukrainian Committee.

Chair: I think he should, yes. Oleksandr, would you mind?

Oleksandr Merezko: Oh no, ladies first. *[Laughter.]*

Chair: Come on, guys, get on with it!

Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Thank you, John, for the question. For us it is very important—and you are rightly supporting this whole idea—that nothing about Ukraine should be decided without Ukraine. That is first and foremost. When our team was in power and I had the privilege of serving in the Government, we also insisted that if not everything is agreed upon, that means that nothing has been agreed upon. I do not think that we can cherry-pick particular points of any plan in any discussion with the Russian Federation right now. We have to see this in its entirety. That means it is not only nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine, but nothing about Europe without Europe. It is critical that our British colleagues, our German colleagues, our Italian colleagues, our Finnish colleagues, our Nordic-Baltic colleagues, are sitting at the table and really looking at how we ensure together that there is a lasting and secure peace, as your Prime Minister has pointed out today.

Ukraine and President Zelensky have put forward a couple of different types of plan; I think there was a victory plan, a peace formula initiative, and so on. The situation is definitely fluid and very difficult on the Ukrainian people, but that does not mean we are less resolute. We have two choices: we can die or we can have a chance to live. It is not die or live; it is die or have a chance to live. That is where we are right now, and we are definitely choosing to have a chance to live, but we do not get that chance if we are under occupation by the Russian Federation, or if we are denied our national identity, our sovereignty and the possibility just to build, create, plan and be a serious part of the international community.

Right now, it is not only about President Zelensky putting forward his plan; it is about us co-ordinating a common vision with European partners much wider than the EU—obviously, that includes the UK and Norway—and with



other partners, such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Canada, that have been backing us. Hopefully, first and foremost, we will also have the United States on board for that common effort, so that together we can pressure Russia to achieve peace—then it will be possible. Russia does understand the language of strength, of unity and of pushing. Russia cannot be talked into peace; it can only be pressured into peace. That plan cannot come exclusively from the President of Ukraine; it has to come from all of us together, with a common vision of how we ensure that we are living in peace and prosperity, as we have done after the second world war.

Q21 Sir John Whittingdale: Perhaps I might bring in our three colleagues from Czechia, Finland and Poland. When I put a question to the Prime Minister earlier this afternoon, I said that if Russia is unwilling to accept something that Ukraine is able to accept, surely we must step up the pressure dramatically on Russia to do so, and use all available means. You represent three countries that are geographically closer to Russia than us. What more do you think we should be doing?

Pavel Fischer: Thank you very much for your trust. I think we need a very strategic approach to Russia. Russia is a nuclear military power that is blatantly disrespecting human life and the human dignity that we cherish. We have to be aware of the major challenge that we are now addressing. If we step back, this is not only about a conflict in the east of Europe; this might have global repercussions, because Russia is not fighting alone. Russia is entangled in a very strange coalition with countries like North Korea, Iran and China, and the repercussions are simply global. This is already a global conflict, which we should approach globally, with all our allies worldwide. This is something that we must also address with an approach based on the principles of the rule of law and on the fundamental texts of the UN, and we must understand how serious the danger might be for every one of us if we do not.

Agnieszka Pomaska: What can we do together? It is a good question. First, I believe that we must be united. Whenever we talk to any partner, we should be together in Europe. What Russia hoped to do was divide us, and it was not successful. My colleague from Finland and his country are a good example, and Sweden is also a good example. We have two new members of NATO, which I am sure is something that Putin did not like. We should do everything we can—maybe it could be something similar—to make Putin angry. What he is really afraid of is a united Europe and transatlantic co-operation with the United States and Canada. What he is afraid of is not only tough statements but action: investment in defence and security systems.

I should remind you that we in Poland know very well what it means in our region to be under Russian influence, or the victim of Russian aggression. That is why we made a decision not to be part of the east but to be part of the west. That is why we are now the 20th largest economy in the world, and why we tripled our spending on security and defence in the last four years—it will be 4.8% of GDP next year. If we all think the same way and have the same goals for security and defence, we will be sure about where



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we have enemies and friends, and it will be much easier. It is very important—here in the UK, too—when there is general political consensus about which direction to choose. We did it in Poland; you did it in the UK. There is huge polarisation in every country, but if we talk about security and defence, it is very important to co-operate. It is not easy, but I am sure that, as we have the same goal, we will achieve it.

Heikki Autto: Honourable Committee members, thank you for the honour of being here today to share my view from the northernmost part of Europe. I also bring you greetings from Santa. I live in Rovaniemi, in the Arctic circle. To see the joy and happiness of the British children visiting him at the moment gives me hope that there is a better future for the world.

Chair: Please ask him not to forget us.

Heikki Autto: I will tell him that you have been good—for which we thank you. We need to have hope when experiencing dark times such as this.

From Finland's point of view, it seems that Russia is pushing to re-establish the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. The main objective for them is, of course, not in Ukraine. Ukrainians have to suffer the most because the Russians want to annex the territory of Ukraine as part of their empire, and they want Ukrainians to vanish as a nation, but the main goal is to undermine the credibility of the strongest pillars of the western defence and security structure: the United Kingdom, France and the United States of America. The way to do that is to compromise the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The United Kingdom, France and the United States guaranteed the internationally recognised borders of Ukraine in the Budapest protocol, when Ukrainians gave up their nuclear arsenal—something they were able to do because they had such great guarantors.

Finland is now a new member of NATO, and I have learned that NATO is about the capabilities that we have together to defend peace in Europe. It is also about credibility and actually keeping our commitments. Then it is about communication and how we tell the world that we are the strongest military alliance in the history of mankind, and how nobody can threaten us. Well, what happens if Russia can compromise the credibility of the three most important pillars of security within NATO? Russia will make sure—they will communicate to the world—that NATO is actually not credible. That is a horrific nightmare for the world—for people in Taiwan, for example, or even in NATO countries. We do not want that to happen, and that is why we have to defend Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity to the very end. That is my point of view.

- Q22 **Dan Carden:** May I start by welcoming our colleagues from the Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine? It is great to have them with us today, Chair. I will put the peace discussions to one side and focus on the battlefield situation. I will come to you, Heikki, and to the chair of the Foreign Policy Committee. Will you update this Committee on the battlefield situation in Ukraine and what Ukraine's primary needs are in terms of weapons

systems?

Heikki Autto: From the point of view of Finland, we encourage the United Kingdom to take part in the PURL initiative, whereby other European countries have been providing Ukrainians by prioritising the weapon systems that we as Europeans cannot provide, but that American industries can. That is why we need American weapons at the moment, in order to enable the Ukrainians to be successful in their just fight against the pure evil of Russia. At the same time, however, we need to build European capabilities, because we need to be strategically autonomous in future. In that way, we will build the strong European pillar of NATO, which will also keep the Americans on board in this common cause to build a secure future.

Q23 **Dan Carden:** Thank you. Oleksandr, may I come to you on the battlefield situation as you know it?

Oleksandr Merezko: This is my subjective point of view; I am not a military person, and I am trying to comprehend what is going on and how serious the situation is. I hope my colleagues from the opposition will correct me or supplement what I am going to say.

The most important thing to say is that situation is difficult, yes, but the front is not going to crumble. For example, fighting is going on now inside Pokrovsk, and we might lose Pokrovsk, but, interestingly, Putin was hoping to conquer Pokrovsk two years ago. The Russian military has made maybe hundreds of declarations that they have already taken Pokrovsk. Despite all that, Pokrovsk still holds. Yes, there are Russian troops, but we continue to fight. Recently, I read an interesting article in *The Economist*, which said that if the Russians advance at the pace that they are advancing right now, it will take them five years to take the whole territory of Donetsk Oblast, and cost them 4 million military casualties. Yes, the situation is difficult, and we are on the defensive, but we have learned how to repel Russian attacks effectively. Of course, there are problems in command and so on, but we are trying to tackle those problems.

From a military perspective, the situation is difficult, but at the same time, it emphasises that we need advanced weaponry. Our attacks inside Russian territory have been very effective. Fighting against Russians on the battlefield is like fighting a dinosaur head-on—it is difficult. But when we are creative, when we attack Russians from different sides—Operation Spiderweb is an excellent example to cite—we can win this asymmetric conflict. But of course, we are talking about a war of attrition, and it is difficult to continue to fight, but again, we have no choice. We understand that we cannot afford to stop defending ourselves. I hope my colleagues from the opposition will explain more clearly.

Q24 **Dan Carden:** Oleksandr, I wanted to come on to personnel. What foreign national troops do we know are fighting on the Russian side?

Oleksandr Merezko: As far as I know, North Koreans and Cubans—about 20,000 Cubans. Can you imagine? We have been raising this issue.



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Officially, Cuba says that it has nothing to do with this, but we understand that Cuba is a totalitarian state, and they could not come to fight without the permission—maybe tacit permission—of the Cuban authorities. That is another big problem—that the totalitarian regimes have solidarity between them—so we should have solidarity between democratic countries.

Q25 Dan Carden: Is there anything more we could do to incentivise other foreign nationals to come on to the Ukrainian side?

Oleksandr Merezhko: Yes, sanctions against those countries that support Russian aggression. I cannot understand why— Well, you are not part the European Union, but unfortunately the EU has provided financial help to the Cuban regime. I do not understand that. I think those totalitarian or authoritarian regimes that support Russian aggression in different kinds of ways should be under sanctions.

Chair: Moving on to sanctions: Phil has got questions on that.

Q26 Phil Brickell: One of my focuses is to ensure that Russia and Putin pay for the war of aggression. Could our Polish, Finnish and Czech colleagues in the room talk a bit about how we could ensure that it is not just the designation of oligarchs, Putin cronies or shadow fleet vessels that takes place? What could we do to ensure that our sanctions regime is effectively enforced? Whoever wants to come in, I would welcome their thoughts.

Heikki Autto: This is a very important question. It cannot be that you can go and kill people, rape them, and destroy their homes, livelihoods, children's schools and so on, without punishment. That is why it was so sad to see the first draft of the 28-point so-called peace plan—that Russia could walk away from this. The first thing we could do to punish Russia, but mainly to help Ukraine to defeat Russia in a strategic way, would be to utilise the frozen Russian central bank assets.

There are some of them in Great Britain that could be utilised here. Most of them are in Belgium, and the European Union is working on finding a legal framework to help the Belgians to do the right thing on this matter. I believe that would be a game changer in the war effort, because the Ukrainians could have the backing of the west. They would understand that they could keep on fighting for as long as it takes, and Russia would understand that the more they attack and destroy Ukraine, the more they have to pay. That would be the right thing to do at the moment.

Agnieszka Pomaska: I think we have general agreement among European countries that we should use frozen assets to pay for the war. There is a main reason that sometimes we forget, or that someone forgot in this 28-point peace agreement: it is Russia that invaded Ukraine, not vice versa. It is Russia that has caused huge damage to Ukraine on different levels. That is why they should pay for it. We should do everything possible to ensure that they pay for that, not us. Of course we support Ukraine, because it is not just a Ukrainian war—we have heard a lot in London about how everyone realises that. It is not a border countries war; we are all in it, which is why we have to deal with it all together. We

have to find solutions for how to use frozen assets and make Russia pay for it.

- Q27 **Phil Brickell:** Perhaps Pavel Fischer, as the one colleague who has not yet spoken, would like to come in on the topic of repurposing frozen Russian state assets. The European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, had proposals earlier in the autumn about instituting a reparation loan to the value of €140 billion, using the frozen assets as they currently stand. Do you think there is any chance that that could move forward through the Commission and the member states of the EU?

Pavel Fischer: I cannot speak for all the member states, but personally I am very much in support, and I think our country, the Czech Republic, is also in favour. Going back to the broader question of sanctions, the shadow fleet presents us with a very challenging situation. In order to apply sanctions, you need to identify every vessel, but you can change the flag and identification of such vessels very easily. The liberal conditions for registering vessels and changing their names present a challenge, and it has created such a mess that you can establish a list that will be out of date tomorrow because of the swift actions of those in possession of those vessels. This is something that we should address more robustly, maybe by using the latest technologies to identify that the same vessel has been re-registered, so that we can enforce compliance with the sanctions that have been adopted.

- Q28 **Richard Foord:** I want to talk about the proposal in the 28-point peace plan to reintegrate Russia into the global economy. Now, this is plainly very important for Donald Trump. He has talked a lot about wanting Russia reintegrated into the global economy. So far, we understand that the word “progressively” might have been inserted by European diplomats, so that Russia might be “progressively” reintegrated into the global economy. The British Prime Minister said in the House of Commons this afternoon that he could not sit round the table at the G8 with Vladimir Putin; and of course, sometimes it is difficult to have both peace and justice.

Can I ask about the proposed Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine? What future do you see for this Special Tribunal, which might try the leaders of Russia for the crime of aggression? Could I ask that first to the United for Ukraine colleagues and then to Committee colleagues?

Heikki Autto: It is of the utmost importance for the whole international community that those who commit war crimes should be taken to the Court and tried, to get justice. That is why we need to establish a Special Tribunal for this, although the Schengen area, for example, should already have given some thought, before a ceasefire or any future peace, to what to do with the smaller criminals below Putin. Of course, Putin would be taken to the Court, but what to do with the smaller suspects? The Ukrainian authorities have been collecting evidence of war crimes, and there are plenty of suspects. It would be very difficult if, for example, Russia started harassing European countries by sending suspected war

criminals, as a hybrid activity to overwhelm the judicial systems in those countries, or if others let those people take a vacation in their countries and did nothing about them. That would really cause some tensions between nations, so we as European countries should all adopt a common approach, and the Special Tribunal is definitely needed.

Agnieszka Pomaska: If I may touch on economic reintegration, which you mentioned, those of us in different parts of Europe already have some experience of trying to have relations with Russia, and it is a really bad experience. We should learn that lesson. That is why we built energy independence and defence independence in Europe, and why we are working towards not being dependent on any other regime. It is crucial that we do not stop what we have started. We started it too late—we started it mainly because of Russia's aggression—but the process is ongoing, and we are becoming more and more independent. Building that independence has made us more secure, and we should simply continue that process. As for this idea of reintegrating or somehow co-operating with Russia, I believe we have learnt that lesson already.

Pavel Fischer: Concerning some of these crimes, which are often war crimes, we speak about universal jurisdiction. We have an obligation to act; we have no choice. I think that international law also has the quality of pre-emptive activity, even before there is a court going on. The judicial system has to work properly, whether it is in the case of Russia or other belligerents. In this cruel war, we spoke about foreign nationals, for instance, who are fighting on the side of Russian soldiers, but the same should apply to the middle east. Double standards are not good for our own security or the preservation of the system of international law.

Q29 **Chair:** If you'll allow me to cut across you, just so that people watching can understand, I think you are referring to point 26 of this 28-point plan, which states, "All parties involved in this conflict will receive full amnesty for their actions during the war and agree not to make any claims or consider any complaints in the future." I say that just so the public watching can understand the context.

Pavel Fischer: Thank you, Chair, for highlighting that point. That is why this "peace proposal" is completely unacceptable; we are obliged to respect international legal obligations that our countries are party to, and it would be the same whether it is this conflict or the Indo-Pacific, for instance. This is why the way in which we succeed in appeasing this conflict has direct global repercussions.

Q30 **Fleur Anderson:** It is important that we are here together today, as four countries united in support for Ukraine, and we really are. Oleksandr, what more would you ask us to do, such as better, joined-up sanctions? Is there anything you think that the international community can do to join up better on those? Is there anything we can do to provide better access to justice? We have already been talking about the big tribunals, or the international courts, but there is also justice that must be supported within Ukraine that will lead to a lasting peace. You cannot have that peace if it is based on injustice, and if the people who have committed crimes go



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unpunished. Do you need help from the international community to support courts and the justice system? There can also be learning from other conflicts; we learned a lot from Bosnia and Srebrenica, including how to take evidence and then use it, and not ask victims to keep repeating their evidence. Is there anything for us to know?

Oleksandr Merezhko: As an international lawyer, I have always had tremendous respect for British lawyers, who have been very prominent in the field of international law, particularly in the injustices heard by the ICJ and ICC. We cannot have international law functioning properly without justice. If aggressors and war criminals are not punished but rewarded, it makes a mockery of international law. That is why we cannot move further without justice.

At the present moment, we have the ICC, in whose jurisdiction are war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide, but unfortunately not the crime of aggression. For that reason, we are trying to create a special international tribunal for the crime of Russian aggression. Of course, we will need your support and help here, but we should not forget about the ICC. Honestly, for me, I disagree when someone tries to impose sanctions on the ICC—I do not understand it. For me, the role model in international justice is the Nuremberg tribunal or, to be more precise, tribunals plural. It took only three months for the Nuremberg tribunal to be created, and it functioned for nine months. It was very swift justice, and very effective.

If it were up to me, I would slightly change one thing about the coming tribunal for the crime of aggression. The jurisdiction deals only with natural persons—with war criminals. For me, it is important to include the state itself. Under international law, a state is a subject. A state is the subject of the crime of aggression. Russia as a state should be brought to justice, not only those who were involved in taking the decision on the aggression—just 20 people or so.

Additionally—there is an interesting example from the Nuremberg tribunal—criminal organisations should be brought to justice. Lots of Russian criminal organisations should be brought to justice, such as the leading political party, the FSB, the SVR and so on. Justice is an absolute necessity, and I would like to count on your support in that regard.

Q31 **Chair:** With everyone's permission, I would like to overrun because we have some important questions.

Mariya Ionova: Is it possible to have a few minutes?

Chair: Of course. I cannot see who is speaking.

Mariya Ionova: It's Mariya.

Chair: Ah! Mariya! We did not even know that we had you online. That's wonderful. Before we hear from you, let me lay the ground. We were supposed to finish at 4.30 pm but, with everyone's permission, I am going to carry on for 15 minutes so that we can hear from you, and because I



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would like to ask Ivanna about the progress on EU membership for Ukraine, and because Aphra has some questions. We will hear from you first, please, Mariya. I am pleased that we have you. Have you also been subject to the blackouts?

Mariya Ionova: Yes. Madam Chair and dear friends, I am happy to see you. There are so many requests from British mass media regarding all these events, and that is also why I was late—sorry. You know that Prime Minister Churchill is very famous in our country, so let me start by saying, as he did, that failure is not the end; the only thing that matters is the courage to continue to struggle. In that regard, to answer a lot of questions that I have heard during the discussion, it is time to be very operative with our American and European friends. There has to be close co-ordination between Ukraine, Europe and the US. Just a few minutes ago, there was a message from the mass media that Zelensky is ready to meet with President Trump to discuss the agreement.

I hope, as Ivanna has said—that is why we are with her, of the same political force—that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. But of course many points are really disappointing. The principles should be secured: it is really about sovereignty, territorial integrity, strong armed forces, responsibility for aggression—as has been discussed—and about EU and NATO membership. I think that very scary threats should also be neutralised; that is regarding the legitimisation of aggression for military gains. All this amnesty for aggressive war crimes is, for us, absolutely unacceptable. It is not only about the last more than three and half a years; it is really about more than 11 years of Russian aggression, because more than 16,000 people were killed between 2014 and 2022.

Although we appreciate that all our friends would like to bring peace to the European continent; you are right that it is not only about Ukraine. But we can stop him only, as you have mentioned, by sanctions. When we are talking about sanctions and secondary sanctions, we discuss them with you. I thank United for Ukraine regarding, for example, the shadow fleet. You know how long we have been discussing it with you, but unfortunately when it comes to strengthening procedures to identify this shadow fleet, which is more than 1,000 Russian vessels, the task is not complete.

On reparation law and secondary sanctions, we realise that American sanctions have been activated, but I think that sanctions must be painful enough to at least take the blood from Russia's military machine. One colleague was asked about the situation on the frontline—we are not controlling the sky and that is why the Russians are successful, especially in Pokrovsk. Their tactic is now to surround the towns. They control from all sides, and from the air. The problem for our Ukrainian armed forces is that we do not control the sky, and whoever controls the sky wins the war. That is why we need air protection and we need electronic warfare. We know that our partners have everything, and we are asking them not to waste time and to give it to us now because we don't want to lose more people.



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The losses are huge. As Oleksandr and Ivanna have mentioned, we really are fighting, but the losses are huge, and we cannot see any punishment for the Russian Federation. I think that, regarding the USA, there is no time. We have to wake up Congress and the think-tanks in America. The peace deal may be ongoing, but there are no deadlines. I have not heard of any deadlines at the moment, even from the Trump administration.

Q32 **Chair:** He wants it agreed by tomorrow, or by Thanksgiving, I think he is saying. He is a man who thought he could agree it in 24 hours.

Mariya Ionova: We have to stop the USA's policy so that they do not make Russia or, at the same time, China great again. In that regard, we kindly ask you to use all your contacts, statements and different institutions to wake up Congress and wake up American think-tanks. You see how fast they are—they are trying to be very operative.

As my colleagues have mentioned, peace must be sustainable. Now, it is like a prelude to another war, which will be not only in Ukraine but in the wider European region. That is why everything matters to us, including substance and guarantees. Also, where are the borders of the democratic world? Where are they? That is why, all together, we have to stop Russia and demand a ceasefire. We will then see if Putin is ready to negotiate.

Q33 **Chair:** Can I ask you a question, Ivanna? We can't pass up this opportunity, given that we have you with us, and given your expertise. It seems, on a day like today, crazy to ask about Ukraine's developing relationship with the European Union, but in this 28-point plan one of the points is that "Ukraine is eligible for EU membership and will receive short-term preferential access to the European market while this issue is being considered." You think, "Where did that come from? That's extraordinary."

Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Probably from Orbán suggesting this to Trump, because he is his pal, and he is actually doing everything possible, and impossible, to stop us joining the EU, or pursuing our path to the EU—just being a bit scatter-gun.

Q34 **Chair:** But they could just veto your membership, could they not?

Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: First, I think that that particular point also came as a surprise for many European nations, even those of us who are supportive of Ukraine's integration.

Agnieszka Pomaska: If I may comment, the problem with all these peace processes is, first—it was underlined here—nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine, but also nothing about Europe without Europe. I do not believe that this peace plan would have been prepared by anyone who wishes success to Europe. So, yes, I think that was a good comment from Ivanna.

Chair: It was a surprise to many, I think.

Agnieszka Pomaska: I would just assure you that we are very much engaged in the enlargement process—including Ukraine, including Moldova and including the western Balkans—because we believe that a bigger



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Europe means a safer, more secure Europe. That is why we need countries like Ukraine and others.

Of course, the process has its acts; it took years for Poland and Lithuania to join the EU, but, at the end, we know that it is something that is worth doing, and our countries are good examples of that. So we will do everything to support and help Ukraine on this path, because it is not just about being in Europe; the whole process is simply good. All the reforms you need to do are tough—it is difficult—but, at the end, the result is very positive.

Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Very briefly, where are we right now? I think there has been an absolutely tectonic change in the perception of European countries with regard to the enlargement process after the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. That opened up the window of opportunity, not exclusively for Ukraine and our European vocation, but by reinvigorating everything that had already been going on with the western Balkans for some time. It also gave possibilities for Moldova, and for Georgia, which unfortunately is not using that right now; it is throwing it into the garbage basket, irrespective of what the Georgian people think. For us, for the Ukrainian people, it is the ray of light at the end of the tunnel, and it is definitely something to look to.

Obviously, we have a lot of homework to do, and martial law is not helping to support the transformation of the country. That could be discussed further, but I think that opening the chapters right now—opening the fundamentals cluster—would make sure that all our good-willing partners from the EU could be more and more engaged in our transformation regarding the rule of law, anti-corruption, and those important things that have to be addressed right now in Ukraine. That is being blocked by artificial attacks on Ukraine, and on the whole European integration process of Ukraine, by Prime Minister Orbán.

I think, having that plan in mind—allow me a slight joke—maybe we should address President Trump with the explanation that, basically, Orbán is standing in the way of Europe taking more responsibility over Ukraine, which is something that Trump wants to achieve. But jokes aside, it is very important right now that we unblock that process, because otherwise we are going to be in stagnation, both on the European side—where pretexts will be found in terms of unfinished internal business of reform inside the EU, for all the aspiring nations—and for us, because it is very difficult to keep the speed of change when you are also fighting this war.

It is very difficult for us and the opposition to pressure the Government for those very much needed reforms. However, it is possible through opening the cluster of negotiations so that everybody engages with it: civil society on the ground, the opposition, and the rational forces inside the authorities and our partners. That sandwich always worked to deliver upon the result, and I am sure that it could deliver on the EU integration of Ukraine as well.



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Chair: Thank you. I have just heard from a reliable source that the “coalition of the willing” call is still going, and that Marco Rubio has joined it even as we are discussing it. We will have a few last questions from Aphra, then the Committee will go into an informal offline session.

Q35 **Aphra Brandreth:** One of the issues that we have not touched on yet is the tens of thousands of Ukrainian children forcibly and systematically abducted by Russia. In the draft of the 28-point peace plan there is talk of a “humanitarian committee”, which would resolve what it calls “outstanding issues”, including a family reunification programme to be implemented. Could any of our Ukrainian colleagues update us on the current situation with those young children and your thoughts on what has been put in the peace plan? How are things going with supporting and reintegrating into Ukrainian society those few children who have been brought back? Perhaps we could start with Oleksandr?

Oleksandr Merezsko: I would like to give the floor to Iryna because she is more knowledgeable about this subject than I.

Iryna Herashchenko: After 2014, the Russian Federation militarised children and young people in the occupied territories. For five years, I was a special representative of President Poroshenko on the peace process and peace plan. I was also a special humanitarian representative for Ukraine at the Minsk Group. I know of many cases where Russia used sexual violations against Ukrainian people to occupy territories. On the militarisation of our children, Russia has exploited Ukrainian children, for example through organising military camps where we have identified Ukrainian children. It is a very important topic, and I thank you for your position. We now want to exploit all parliamentary mechanisms to report this topic and that information.

A second point: Russia has thousands and thousands of Ukrainian people, military and civilian, in prison. For example, 26 Ukrainian journalists are now prisoners. For us, it is a very important humanitarian aspect of all peace negotiations to exchange prisoners, but Russia now does not take information to Ukrainian prisoners and has blocked the Red Cross from prisons. You are right that the humanitarian aspects are a very important point of all peace negotiations.

Aphra Brandreth: Thank you.

Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: It is important that the whole world knows about abducted and deported Ukrainian children, but Russian crimes against Ukrainian children are not only abductions—it is terrible thing to say. They are being turned into another nationality, which, as far as I recall the international law, is a genocide. It is a crime of genocide. That is something that is happening with our children.

Yes, we have almost 20,000 cases of confirmed deportations of Ukrainian children. Yes, we have a couple of hundred who have been returned through the efforts of different churches and our middle eastern colleagues, but it is very one by one. Every single child’s life is like a

jewel. We will continue doing this. We should explore any opportunity to get them back.

If Russia really wanted to show that it wants peace, I think that would be the very first thing: you return children and then you are showing some good will. It is not even about the exchange of prisoners of war; it is about the lives of little people who cannot make decisions for themselves in the majority. We are not seeing that, and I think that is a very telling story of what Russia's real intentions are.

You also have to remember that our children are being killed every single day while they are asleep. I do not know whether you have seen the horrific video of a father burying his two children and his wife. One of the children is less than one year old. He is holding a coffin—cradling a coffin—before the burial. This is not possible to live through. They are being killed, wounded and left without shelter. Our kids are waking up at night, stressed by the noise. We do not even know how big a problem children's mental health is going to be and how that will be addressed. There is so much more to the tragedy of our children that is not much in focus.

There are rehabilitation efforts and families taking care of the children who have come back, and the state is involved in that, but the scope of this crime is much bigger than even the number of children that we know have been deported. Russia's so-called ombudsman for children's rights—she is also under indictment by the International Criminal Court—has said that about 700,000 Ukrainian children have been "resettled" to the Russian Federation. We cannot allow that to happen. Iryna mentioned militarisation—the military camps, the training, and the illegal enforcement of their forced participation in the military assault on Ukraine. This is still ongoing.

Mariya Ionova: May I add to that?

Chair: We are running out of time, but we would still love to hear from you, if you are able to make a relatively short contribution.

Mariya Ionova: It will be short. Thank you for raising this issue; it is a tragedy for us, because it is not really about 20,000 children—it is 100,000. The problem is identifying them. The problem is also that they are changing their Ukrainian identity. For example, teenagers, when they turn 18, are mobilised into the Russian army and used against the Ukrainian people and nation.

For the media, it is more important to speak about all the war crimes. Of course, we also have the facts from Melitopol, a town near the sea of Azov. In kindergartens and schools, they are teaching children Soviet symbols, Soviet songs, Russian propaganda, anthems and so on. It is really genocide—not for our future, because this is our today.

Chair: Thank you. On that very powerful point, I want to close this formal session. We will have an informal session afterwards, if we may. It would be lovely to mark this meeting with a photograph. In the meantime, may I



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thank everyone for their contributions to today's meeting? It is vital that we continue to maintain our strong connections with Ukraine and our total support for Ukraine. We are very grateful to other European colleagues who have come here today with the same motivation and desire to support Ukraine, and to ensure that there is finally some justice and a proper peace for the Ukrainian people. It is important to keep up with ongoing developments. All there is to say now is: Slava Ukraini.

Witnesses: Heroiam slava.