

Poroshenko's Peace Plan Is Anything But

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Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko recently announced a one-week cease-fire in the eastern and southern regions of the country and simultaneously unveiled a peace plan for the rebellious region.

However, this long-awaited plan has very little chance of success. This is not because Poroshenko is incapable of implementing its provisions or because the plan is somehow defective, but because the main outside players — Russia on the one hand and the U.S. and the European Union on the other — have not yet resolved their fundamental geopolitical differences. Until Russia and the West reach a political compromise, it is unlikely that anyone, including Poroshenko, can stabilize the situation in Ukraine.

The fault in Poroshenko's plan is that it is primarily tactical, and not strategic.

The tactical elements of the peace plan are clearly outlined. The plan calls for the militias to disarm, end their occupation of public buildings and cities and free their hostages in return for amnesty for those not guilty of serious crimes, safe passage to Russia for the separatists and their mercenary cohorts and the creation of a 10-kilometer-wide buffer zone along

the Ukrainian-Russian border. The plan also calls for Ukrainian television and radio broadcasts to resume and regional and local authorities to return to work.

The strategically important elements of Poroshenko's peace plan, meanwhile, call for constitutional reform, new parliamentary elections, the redistribution of some national income to regional and municipal budgets, the decentralization of authority and economic development aid for the eastern and southern regions.

However, the plan bypasses the strategically important question of the status of the Russian language as well as the overall issue of ideological tolerance for the values and beliefs of ethnic minorities, primarily in the country's south and east.

These issues have become all the more important due to the disproportionate use of military force in those areas. Indiscriminate attacks have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians who had no connection to the separatists in the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, and led to the mass exodus of refugees from the region into Russia.

Tensions between ethnic Russians and the Ukrainian authorities are likely to grow even higher under the current plan, as Poroshenko promises to resume military operations after the current cease-fire expires. This will only worsen the growing humanitarian disaster that includes water and power shortages in the besieged cities.

Even if the crisis ultimately ends peacefully, the current use of disproportionate force in those regions is only exacerbating feelings of hate and the already formidable divide over language, culture and politics plaguing Ukrainian society. It seems the authorities in Kiev have not fully considered this problem.

Washington, Brussels, Berlin and Warsaw, though, will undoubtedly give full support to Poroshenko's peace plan. They cannot but smile over Poroshenko's openly pro-Western course and his readiness to sign a full-fledged association agreement with the EU at the earliest possible date.

The West, of course, cannot help but like the unambiguously European stance Poroshenko took in his inaugural address as well as his willingness to increase military spending and to improve the combat readiness of the Ukrainian Army. "Our Army, Navy, National Guard and professional special forces are our most reliable allies and the best guarantors of peace!" Poroshenko said.

The West must also have been impressed by Poroshenko's tough and unbending tone, especially in his pronouncement that "There can be no compromise on the questions of Crimea, Ukraine's European choice and the structure of the state." However, the tougher Poroshenko's tone and actions become, the further he pushes Ukraine from any hope of peace and stability.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has already spoken for Moscow by rejecting the unconditional nature of Poroshenko's plan and calling Kiev's refusal to negotiate with the militias controlling Donetsk, Luhansk and Slovyansk a violation of the agreements reached in Geneva in April.

Meanwhile, the militiamen — whom Kiev considers terrorists — continue their armed resistance and announced the capture of a military base housing hundreds of tanks and armored personnel carriers.

In the 1990s and early 2000s the EU followed the unspoken principle of "Russia first," meaning that it always considered Moscow's opinion before taking any serious steps concerning the former Soviet republics.

However, the EU began moving away from that strategy with the creation of its European Partnership, or EP, program in 2003, and especially when it actively encouraged EP countries to sign association agreements with the EU. That triggered a heated conflict between the EU and Russia over Ukraine, and might soon lead to another over Moldova, a country that also plans to sign such an agreement.

Russia not only fears that Ukraine and Moldova will break away from Moscow's sphere of influence, but that they may become military threats if they join NATO. Petro Poroshenko's bellicose and unequivocal rhetoric only reinforces such fears.

Given the uncompromising stance of all parties involved, from Poroshenko to the militiamen fighting in Donetsk and Luhansk, this "peace plan" for Ukraine is doomed to failure. The violence and bloodshed will most likely continue, and Ukraine will slip further into the living hell of a civil war.

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