

Ukraine's Zelensky Says Everything on Table if Putin Meets

By [AFP](#)

March 22, 2022



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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky renewed an offer of direct peace talks with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin late Monday, declaring the status of disputed territories could be up for debate and a possible referendum.

Zelensky told local media that he was ready to meet Putin "in any format" to discuss ending the almost one-month-old war that has shattered several Ukrainian cities.

Zelensky said even the status of Russian-occupied Crimea and Russian-backed statelets in Donbas was up for debate.

"At the first meeting with the president of Russia, I am ready to raise these issues," he said.

"There will be no appeals or historical speeches. I would discuss all issues with him in great

detail," Zelensky said.

Russia has declared Crimea part of Russia and recognized the independence of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic in eastern Ukraine.

All three areas were part of Ukraine following the collapse of the Soviet Union and are at the center of a decade-old crisis that on Feb. 24 spilt into invasion and full-scale war.

"If I have this opportunity and Russia has the desire, we would go through all the questions," he told Ukrainian journalists in an interview published by media outlet Suspilne.

"Would we solve them all? No. But there is a chance, that we partially could — at least to stop the war," he added.

Although Zelensky signaled that he was willing to talk about the status of the three areas, he has repeatedly insisted all three were part of Ukraine and that his country would not surrender.

Zelensky also warned that any peace agreement involving "historic" changes would be put to a national referendum.

Sonia Mycak, a Ukraine expert at the Australian National University said the promise of a popular vote likely dooms any suggestion of Kyiv ceding territory.

"The vast majority, like 80%, of Ukrainians are saying that they do not want to relinquish" those territories, Mycak said, citing two recent public opinion polls.

"I think it would be rejected by the population, I really do. Very high numbers of Ukrainians are saying 'we should not stop fighting'," she added.

"Ukrainians see themselves as under existential threat. It's not just the loss of territory it's the fact that they would have to live as Russians, there would be heavy Russification, there would be autocratic control."

A month of talks between Ukrainian and Russian officials have so far failed to stop or even slow a war that has forced 3.5 million Ukrainians to leave the country.

But with Russia's much-larger military seemingly unable to occupy the entire country or topple Zelensky's ever-more-popular government, the Ukrainian leader said the war was inevitably going to end at the negotiating table.

"It is impossible not to have a solution. By destroying us, he is definitely destroying himself," Zelensky said of Putin.

"I do not want us to go down in history as heroes and as a nation that does not exist... And if they destroy themselves, they won't even have any heroism left."

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