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# ‘We Cannot Trust the Russians’: Ukrainians Skeptical Toward Ceasefire Hopes

By Joseph Roche and Joshua R. Kroeker

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**Joseph Roche**

KYIV, Ukraine — "Mother, do not scold me, do not scold me, I do not even know where I will die."

The haunting chorus of a Ukrainian funeral song echoes through the speakers of a battered old pickup truck, filling the air with a heavy solemnity.

Along Kyiv’s long Khreshchatyk Avenue, time seems to stand still. Throats tighten, tears fall. One by one, passersby kneel as the funeral procession passes. The lament continues.

"Oh, strangers will bury me, little mother, will you not grieve?"

Some cross themselves. A woman sobs uncontrollably. A megaphone crackles: "Kyiv

welcomes its heroes."

For the past two weeks, a palpable nervousness has gripped Ukraine. Faces are drawn, eyes filled with concern. Ukrainians have watched in shock as their American ally wavered and as Donald Trump launched attacks on their country, their president and their future — first on social media, then from the Oval Office, followed by the suspension of U.S. aid and intelligence sharing.

Sitting in a café in central Kyiv, Sofiia, a resident of Odesa, told The Moscow Times that she has felt worse in recent months than she did in the weeks before Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022.

She said she has a sense of “complete uncertainty and confusion,” and now, after three years of war, “a complete lack of hope.”

After lengthy talks with U.S. counterparts in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, a Ukrainian delegation announced they were prepared for a 30-day ceasefire “on land, in the skies and at sea.”

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, pleased with the progress toward "a forthcoming peace," declared that "the ball is now in Russia's court" and announced that Washington would restore previously authorized military aid as well as intelligence sharing.

On Thursday, President Vladimir Putin said he would "support" a proposed ceasefire in Ukraine, but added that it should bring "lasting peace" and details would first need to be discussed with the U.S. before a final decision is made.

## No more hope

"I feel like I’m living in cognitive dissonance," says Nina, 31, her large blue eyes filled with tears. She has come to attend the funeral of a friend killed on the front lines a few days ago.

"I don't really know what to think about everything that’s happening,” she says. “I’m just proud of our president, Zelensky. I think he managed to maneuver well with the Americans and, despite the dispute in the Oval Office, remained dignified and acted in Ukraine’s best interests."

A deep sense of confusion appears to have taken hold of Ukraine. Faced with an erratic U.S. foreign policy, Ukrainians no longer know what to believe.

"I wouldn’t say that the U.S. has betrayed us," says Vlad Ivanchuk, in his 40s. "But one thing is certain: we will never fully trust the Americans again. Our future is in Europe, and I know that Europe will never abandon us."

Nina fears that these negotiations will leave them in a state of limbo and unpredictability.

"We are anxious, and it is almost impossible to plan ahead. But we continue to trust the Ukrainian forces, and we know we are not alone — that Europe keeps supporting us. We believe in a shared future because, more than anyone, we uphold the values Europe stands for. And we pay for it with our blood," she says.

The suspension of U.S. military aid and intelligence sharing with Kyiv following the Feb. 28 Oval Office clash between Trump and Zelensky brought this unpredictability into stark relief.

"I feel the consequences personally — there's been an increase in shelling and enemy assaults," one Ukrainian soldier tells The Moscow Times on condition of anonymity.

"If Europe can't compensate for this gap, the results will be disastrous. In short, they'll flush us down the drain," he says.

But no one feels confident that Ukraine's allies will take the action needed to ensure their country's security — or that of Europe as a whole.

"It feels like we have been betrayed," laments Tatiana, a resident of Kherson in southern Ukraine. "Western partners are asleep and cannot wake up. They are incapable of looking a few steps ahead to realize that soon, this war will reach them too. For now, they are just watching Ukraine being killed like it's some kind of reality show."

Hours before Putin said he would be open to a ceasefire, Moscow launched a new wave of airstrikes against Ukraine and continued its assaults on the Kursk region, where Ukrainian forces — struggling for days — appear on the verge of retreat.

### How to negotiate?

Many Ukrainians share the view that the proposed ceasefire is unlikely to lead to a lasting peace.

"Even if the war stops for a while, it will start again at some point," says Kristina, 25. Originally from Mykolaiv, she is raising her son, Ilya, alone.

"My husband has been serving in the army since 2022. He and his comrades don't even talk about a possible ceasefire. They don't believe in it. And they know that nothing will change. Even if there's a ceasefire, they will not leave the front," she says.

Katrin, who lived under Russian occupation in Kherson in 2022, voiced frustration toward Western leaders' interest in negotiating a peace deal, criticizing what she sees as an inability to understand the true nature of their adversary.

"Only those who lived under occupation and constant attacks truly know who Russians are," says Katrin. "Even people from Kyiv don't know what war is, let alone the West. [The Russians] came in, they destroyed books in Ukrainian, they literally tortured civilians... they're cruel and soulless. Yet I do understand why people in the West — who only know a very comfortable life — can't imagine such cruelty exists."

Lisa Yasko, a member of parliament from Zelensky's Servant of the People party, shares the widespread skepticism among Ukrainians toward a possible ceasefire.

"We've had more than 10 years of war. We know that the Russians have a habit of not respecting ceasefires," she says.

"When the ground on the front line gets dry [late March-early April], Russians will go on a

massive offensive," another MP said on condition of anonymity.

Some fear that a pause in hostilities and the U.S. rapprochement with Moscow could give the Russians time to regroup and rearm for a wider attack.

“Just like in 1936, when they feared Hitler and gave him everything he wanted, only to end up with a war anyway — and then they wondered, ‘How did this happen?’” the anonymous soldier says, adding: “You can't negotiate with a tiger when your head is in its mouth.”

But Yasko insists that agreeing to the truce was important — both to ease tensions between Kyiv and Washington and to demonstrate Ukraine’s goodwill and expose Russia’s warlike intentions.

"Zelensky is a very skilled negotiator and has a talent for understanding people. But emotions in the Oval Office are not productive,” Yasko says. “That’s why I think it’s very good that he was absent from these negotiations in Jeddah. At this stage, it is beneficial that discussions are not happening directly between Donald Trump and Zelensky, but between the two delegations."

Yet Yasko says she does not believe in a quick peace.

Nor does Kristina. But above all, she opposes any further territorial concessions to Russia.

"I don’t want my city [Mykolaiv] to end up under Russian occupation just because Trump and Putin decided so," she says.

A November 2024 Gallup poll found that just over half of Ukrainians are open to territorial concessions, while 38% oppose them.

"But you saw what happened. Trump negotiates, and that same evening, the Russians attack us harder than ever," Kristina says.

“I think that we won't get back what Russians took,” says Katrin. “I think that the West spat on all that we lost — the lives, cities, etc.”

Yet glimmers of resilience persist amid the confusion, pessimism and weariness.

“No matter what people say, in the army, people are still ready to destroy the enemy — it's just all running on enthusiasm now,” the anonymous soldier explains, suggesting that morale among frontline troops remains intact despite diplomatic setbacks and fears for the future.

"We are living in a time of change. I would [like to be living in other] times, but unfortunately I [am] living right now," the anonymous MP said.

Like MP Yasko, Kristina wants to believe in the possibility of peace.

"Maybe there will be a ceasefire. But the Russians will use that time to rearm and attack us again," Kristina says.

"But we are ready to try," insists Yasko. "At the very least, we have to try."

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