

What is Zelensky's Long Game? The View From Ukraine's Presidential Office

Note: this is a rush transcript and may contain errors.

Eric Ciaramella:

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, wherever you are in the world. I'm Eric Ciaramella, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. I'm very excited today to be hosting Ihor Zhovkva, Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine and diplomatic advisor to President Zelensky. Ambassador Zhovkva has a distinguished career as one of Ukraine's top experts on foreign policy and European integration. Welcome, Ihor.

Ihor Zhovkva:

Thank you.

Eric Ciaramella:

Today we're going to be having a wide-ranging discussion on things related to the upcoming NATO summit, security guarantees and more. Before we begin, I'd like to give a special thanks to the New Europe Center and Alyona Getmanchuk who helped organize today's event. I'd also like to thank my Carnegie colleagues who made this live event possible on short notice. My colleagues will be keeping an eye on the chat in YouTube. For those watching this live, please feel free to submit questions for the Ambassador, and they will get sent to me to ask him.

I'll also mention that this event is part of a new Ukraine initiative that Carnegie is launching. In the months ahead, you'll be seeing more events like this and written research from us on a variety of topics related to Ukraine's long-term security, economic reconstruction and wartime political transformation. So, stay tuned. With that, let's dive in and I think we should begin with the upcoming NATO summit in Vilnius, which could very well be a turning point in Ukraine's long-term security relationship with the West. So, Ambassador, could you walk us through Ukraine's expectations for the summit? What does success look like?

Ihor Zhovkva:

Thank you, Eric. Thank you once again for having me here before such a distinguished audience, dear colleagues, great to have all of you here. And let me start way ahead of, a little bit more than a week before the Vilnius summit and I will try in my introductory remarks to explain why Vilnius is so important to Ukraine, why NATO is so important to Ukraine, and why Ukraine is so important to the Euro-Atlantic Community. So why NATO for Ukraine? I mean, remember on the 30th of September last year, my president was making a formal application for membership in NATO. He signed this application together with the speaker of the parliament and the prime minister of Ukraine and sent it to the Secretary General. The Secretary General spread it across the member states. The idea was very simple. I mean, we took the Washington Treaty and examined Article 10, which is about what the so-called criteria are when a European country may become a member of NATO.

And those criteria or conditions are very simple. Condition number one is to further, I quote, the principles of this treaty, which we understand [to be] Euro-Atlantic values. And you can easily probably agree that Ukraine not only shares these Euro-Atlantic values, but Ukraine fights for Euro-Atlantic values. We had two revolutions fighting for Euro-Atlantic values in my country. We unfortunately experienced aggression by Russia in 2014; the main thing was because Russia didn't want us to share

European and Euro-Atlantic values. And open aggression in 2022 was again because Russia didn't want Ukraine to become a part of the European Euro-Atlantic family. Rather, Russia wanted Ukraine to stay in the loop of the former USSR, having us as an integral element of USSR 2.0.

This is no desire for Ukrainians. We would like to be a member of the Euro-Atlantic family rather than the Soviet family, of the European Union and NATO rather than USSR 2.0. And criteria number two is to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area, which leads us back to the Madrid Declaration adopted last year, where the main threat to Europe Atlantic security was defined as Russia. Now Ukraine is the country which is having a real-time war because of Russian aggression. We are defending our territory; we're defending our territory with the efforts and activities of our courageous armed forces. We're not having any single boots on the ground. But by defending our territory, the territory of a country which is in the center of Europe, which is one of the biggest countries in Europe in terms of both population and territory. So, by defending our country, we're defending also the Euro-Atlantic Security.

So that's why the decision was taken to apply for membership and once and for all to cut any possible speculation, not only from the aggressor state, but from other states, about whether Ukraine could still be neutral. Whether Ukraine could still opt for non-alignment status. No, from now on from the 30th of September, Ukraine doesn't have any opportunity, any possibility to become neutral or non-aligned. Ukraine wants to become a part of NATO. A full-fledged member of NATO. This position of the president and the leadership of the country is supported by 82% of Ukraine's population, a rather high number throughout the years of independence. Usually, it was the case when some people were still having doubts, some people were strongly supporting, some were in between. But after this open Russian aggression, the mood of the population is crystal clear. We see Ukraine as integral part of NATO and we see NATO as the only guarantee of Ukraine's security. And we see how Ukraine can contribute to Euro-Atlantic security.

So, this is the new reality. We can no longer speak in the narrative which was before open Russian aggression or the narrative which was before the application for membership. Why Vilnius? It's very simple: the Vilnius NATO summit is the best opportunity for allies to react to the application for membership. The allies cannot pretend that there is no application for membership of Ukraine. When, last year, Sweden and Finland submitted their application for membership in May, in June, if I'm not mistaken, there was a reaction at the NATO summit. A decision was made to invite these two countries for membership, and then the procedures followed. Now we see Finland has already become the 31st member of NATO and we're kicking off in this course and we're hoping that despite some difficulties, Sweden will also become the 32nd member of NATO. So, Ukraine has all the rights and deserves an appropriate response from allies at the Vilnius summit, at the summit, where leaders, heads of state and governments are present, to have a response to its application.

What is the outcome? What is the desired outcome for my country? Again, we're not inventing the bicycle. And we do understand that there are procedures and there are procedures which applied before to countries which became NATO members. And there are procedures which are applied now to two countries, which are Sweden and Finland. I mean that we now can say that we do not need the mechanism of a membership action plan. Why? Because we were promised to apply for the Membership Action Plan for Ukraine as long as in 2008. Remember, the wording of the Bucharest summit was, "Ukraine will become a member of NATO and Ukraine will have a Membership Action Plan." And that was 15 years ago. We did not receive that in 2008. But in our turn, we in fact are starting to implement a Membership Action Plan. How? We invented the instrument of Annual National Programs (ANPs). We drafted these programs year by year together with the headquarters of NATO and

those programs consisted of those main five elements of a Membership Action Plan. We fulfilled year by year the reforms envisaged by each and every of these five pillars.

And at the end of each year, we had an evaluation, a joint evaluation by Ukraine and NATO headquarters, of the progress achieved within the implementation of those ANPs. So, in fact, we had a MAP without an umbrella of a MAP. And any state, any institution, can turn to the headquarters in Brussels and can see the progress which Ukraine has undergone starting from 2009, when we started to implement these ANPs, til 2021. In 2022, unfortunately, we were not able even to sign an ANP because the open aggression started, and we were preoccupied with fighting the aggressor. But in any case, 13 programs, or 13 ANPs, have already been implemented and once again you can check what progress has been made. So, in this case we are simply asking for the same procedure the allies applied to two countries, which I mentioned. And once again, the best outcome for Ukraine in Vilnius would be to start the process of joining NATO.

And by starting the process of joining NATO, I mean certainly invitation to membership. You all know - you are good experts in this sphere - that this is only the first stage. Many more stages are to follow. The next stages are negotiations on the accession protocol and then the procedures to sign the protocol and then ratification. Then we are now talking about finalizing membership of Ukraine in NATO before the end of the war. We are realistic people, we do understand that before the victory of Ukraine, Ukraine cannot be admitted to NATO, and we are not demanding this. But what we are asking for, to start this process, to start with the station number one, and then we have a very good formula which we already introduced in 20 declarations between Ukraine and individual NATO member states. My president signed it with 20 leaders, 20 head of states and governments. And we have a very good formula in most of them to support the membership of Ukraine in NATO when conditions allow. This would be a very positive and very reassuring message we could get from this summit.

Why is Vilnius the best time to take this bold decision? We do understand the factor of Russia. I hear from many, many experts and partners including in the Global South, many speculations that Russia is still strong, that Russia still may have this-or-that reaction. I will simply ask you the question, was there any strong reaction by Russia when Finland became the 31st member of NATO? When we think, what will be the reaction when Sweden finally becomes the 32nd member of NATO? I like the words that President Biden just recently said - I think it was at the beginning of this week and he was commenting on the recent uprising, the recent mutiny in Russia. His evaluation was that now Russia is weaker, it's weaker than ever before. Russia is thinking now about how its internal system will survive after this insurrection.

So, once again, let's imagine that Russia will somehow try to consolidate as they usually did throughout history. But right now, at this point, besides being preoccupied on the frontline against Ukraine, Russia is preoccupied with its internal affairs, having shown to the whole of world the weakness of its system. The weakness of the reaction of law enforcement agencies or armed forces to the attempted coup or whatever you call it. I will not speculate here; this is an internal event of Russia. But what all of us have to think about is that now we have a very good window of opportunity to take bold and strong decisions and should not be weak in making these decisions.

Eric Ciaramella:

So Igor, can I follow up as you've put a lot of very interesting ideas and issues on the table here. So just to drill down to specifics on what would constitute a successful outcome for the summit, you mentioned kind of clarifying that the procedure of a Membership Action Plan is no longer applicable, obviously because Finland and Sweden didn't have to go through it. And you would want an assurance that also Ukraine wouldn't have to go through that. It sounds from what I've read that something like that is

probably doable, although I don't have any particular insights into the negotiations among allies. Would that be enough to constitute a success insofar as it would simplify and clarify the procedure for Ukraine to enter at a later date? Or are you saying that a formal invitation is really the bare minimum that would constitute a successful outcome?

Ihor Zhovkva:

Well, I hate to have it in the term successful or not successful, let's put it like this, resultful or absence of any result, meaningful in terms of signals or sending a weak signal. Let's imagine that the language of the Vilnius summit is not strong. I mean, there will certainly be some decisions; we do not know what is now being prepared within the NATO kitchen, so to speak. Probably the process of drafting languages is now Brazilian. Let's imagine that there will be only some decisions which we are already hearing about like turning the Ukraine-NATO Commission into the Ukraine-NATO Council. A very good decision, a very needed decision; it's high time to renew the format of relations between Ukraine and NATO. The commission, if I'm not mistaken, was established in 1997 in this charter of a distinguished partnership and I think we utilized all the capacities. So, I'm thankful to NATO allies that they found the possibility to renew the activities of NATO-Ukraine Commission, which were blocked for some period.

And we certainly support this possible decision of turning the commission into NATO-Ukraine Council, which would allow my country to be present at the table with the rest of the allies. Or what we're also hearing is about possibly renewing or enhancing the comprehensive assistance package and having a kind of multi-year program for Ukraine. We are thankful for the assistance, for the new lethal assistance, which is provided by CAP already and, as I understand, will be increased. We're also thankful to individual NATO countries who are providing US military assistance, extensive military assistance on the battlefield, which helps us to be successful throughout eight or nine months, when Russia was having absolutely no successes on the battlefield. We have been able to get back almost 50% of the territories of Ukraine, which were captured after the open aggression in February 2022.

But let's imagine that these are the only decisions and the only outcomes of the NATO Vilnius summit, and absolutely no political decision is taken on the path, on the algorithm, of how Ukraine goes and what is the end matter of this path, what is membership for Ukraine. So, imagine what signal it will send to the aggressor capital, to the aggressor president. Look, 500 days of war, and I will remind you that exactly on the 8th of July, just ahead of the Vilnius summit, will be having the sad anniversary of 500 days of open aggression of Russia against Ukraine. So, 500 days will have passed, and Ukraine will not be one centimeter closer to NATO. NATO has not taken any major decision with Ukraine. So, Ukraine is outside NATO and will be outside NATO in the future, which, practically, logically, brings the aggressor president to further escalation.

I mean, there is no response and practically NATO has managed to stay before this red line which he crossed before the open aggression, which he's telling us about, during the aggression, that membership of Ukraine to NATO is a non-issue. It's not even an issue, it should never be addressed. So, this is what I called the result or absence of a result. In this case, that was a very good signal for him and very bad signal for all of us, not only certainly for Ukraine but for the Euro-Atlantic community. Because once again I can reiterate that Ukraine is already now bringing its input, its contribution to the Euro-Atlantic Security, and imagine what input Ukraine will be able to bring to Euro-Atlantic Security after victory.

We'll have one of the strongest brigades equipped with your weaponry. Our soldiers will have the knowledge of how to master this weaponry in a very short period of time. How to train to use this weaponry, how to use this weaponry once again against definitely not the second-strongest army in the world (his myth evaporated totally, I think, when they entered Ukraine openly), but sadly not the weakest army in the world. And Ukraine will be able to be... would be able and has a desire to be

responsible for the security not only on the territory of Ukraine but in this broader territory of Central Eastern Europe where we will belong. Because even after our victory, Russia will still be aggressive, and it will not disappear. Ukraine will be there where we are. We will not be displaced somewhere else.

We will be here in what now you call an eastern flank. We'll be here, we will be ready to take our share of responsibility for the security of this part of the world, for the security of the rest of the countries. I mean when we come into Moldova, we are openly hearing that the security guarantee for Moldova is now Ukraine. There are also some other countries of the former Soviet Union which still have an open-ended conflict. I mean Georgia, I mean other countries. We are ready to be responsible for the security of this part of the world. But definitely in this case, a very logical scenario would be for us to be among the Euro-Atlantic Community to have this share of responsibility. To be together coordinating that in terms of potential aggression from Russia, which might still happen unfortunately even after our victory. We would all be together; we all be much better prepared, and the reaction would be stronger, and the deterrence effect would be stronger.

Eric Ciaramella:

So can I follow up on that because you talked a lot about signals and I think this is perhaps—you know, as I'm trying to diagnose analytically what the kind of different views are between Ukraine and central European countries, on the one hand, and the United States and some western European countries on the other regarding NATO membership and the Vilnius summit—I do believe it's actually about signals. And on the one hand you have Ukraine and the central Europeans that think an invitation will send a strong deterrent signal to Russia. On the other hand, you have the United States and other allies that worry that issuing an invitation now is not a credible signal because there's no clear path to complete the accession process until the war is over.

So even though you rightly mentioned that an invitation does not trigger an immediate process by which Ukraine becomes a member by a certain date—it could take years or one year in the case of Finland or, again, we don't know—but even if that's the case, the sheer invitation and the process of accession and looking towards that end point will force some uncomfortable decisions and scenarios while the war is still ongoing. And so I just want to talk these through because I think there's kind of two different logics at play. So again, from Washington's perspective, it seems like an invitation and movement towards accession would present maybe four different kind of scenarios. So, either, one: Ukraine has to keep fighting until it liberates its entire territory in order to enter NATO hull. And that could take years and it could come at a huge human cost to Ukraine. That's scenario one.

Scenario two, Ukraine could enter NATO divided like West Germany did. But that would entail a defacto recognition of territorial partition because West Germany was forced to pledge never to initiate military action against the east as a condition for membership. That was in the documents in the 1954 London Conference before they entered [NATO] the following year. So it would freeze the lines wherever they are and that could be a partition that would last potentially decades like it did for Germany. That's the second scenario. The third scenario would be, NATO has to somehow modify Article 5 to mean something different in Ukraine's case, which would diminish its deterrent power. And scenario four, NATO would have to enter the war directly in order to expel the remaining Russian troops from Ukraine's legal territory.

So obviously all four of those scenarios are problematic and the invitation itself doesn't actually get Ukraine any additional security during this accession process—the period of vulnerability between the invitation and the accession. And so that explains some of the reluctance from Washington's logic. So I guess, what would be your kind of counterargument in terms of the signaling to those who say that an invitation now simply is not a credible promise and it's writing a check that we can't cash, so to speak,

because we don't know the circumstances under which the war will end, with an armistice or a full peace treaty, Ukraine liberating all of its territory or not? So what would your counterargument to that be?

Ihor Zhovkva:

Well, those scenarios, the four scenarios you mentioned, in each and every of them probably could potentially be realistic or unrealistic and there is no need to speculate on this for a very simple reason. Let's get down to the battlefield. We will fight as long as it takes and our partners will be next to us for as long as it takes, supporting us not fighting, certainly not the boots of the ground, but supporting us for as long as it takes. And I really like the attitude of our partners in France and allies who are Italian: Ukraine will define what will be the victory for Ukraine. And for Ukraine the trajectory and the utmost goal is certainly to liberate all its territories as of 24th of August 1991, full stop. And here you cannot have any possible scenarios, only scenario one and the ultimate scenario for us. How long would it take? What efforts will it take? How many victims from Ukraine will it take? No one knows, unfortunately, but definitely Ukraine will be the first country to have it as soon as possible.

And here once again, each and every ally, we're having our sincerest gratitude and thanks for the support - each and every piece of military equipment or ammunition or financing or sanctions, this is what matters. And the louder Russia for instance claims that sanctions do not work the more it means that they are really working. Undermining their power, their economic capacities much slower than we wanted, than he could have imagined, slowly but gradually. And these efforts we will continue again together with our Western airlines till the victory. But it's talking about membership in NATO. Sometimes we hear the position is either/or. Either the military support or success or progress in the integration into NATO. And I wonder why this is either/or. Once again, no one will now tell you when exactly the war will end. We can definitely tell you that we understand that we cannot be a member of NATO before the war ends. But what will happen after the war, after our victory?

How quickly things might move. We can also now speculate, make theories and forecasts, but no one can tell you exactly. We would like to have for Ukraine to be prepared for this. And once again, we are not speeding up the process. Many countries enter it and you're rightfully saying Eric, how long it would take. We have the examples of countries which enter NATO within one year like Finland you mentioned. And they have several examples of countries whose path to NATO was many, many, many years long and some conditions were put, some necessity of reforms, additional reforms were put. But in the end or in the beginning or in the middle of the process, they did know the ultimate goal, the final stop on this way, on this Euro-Atlantic path like we call it in some bilateral declarations.

The end goal for these countries was becoming a full-fledged member of NATO. So, what is that? If Ukraine is being given now this final stop and the final stop in being membership to NATO, the way it was in the Bucharest declaration was a very good way. 15 years ago, it followed by the instrument which was suggested to Ukraine. And sorry, we may clearly say now that a mistake was made back then in 2008 not to give Ukraine a membership action plan. Some were probably very cautious about not provoking Russia in 2008. And look what happened exactly when Ukraine and another country, Georgia were not given a MAP in 2008. Hasn't it provoked Russia? In 2008 they started aggression against Georgia and still part of Georgia is occupied. In 2014 they started aggression against Ukraine, trying to have an attempted occupation of Crimea and then a part of Donbas. In 2022 they started open aggression against Ukraine. So, are we still now in the mood of not provoking Russia?

Eric Ciaramella:

Yeah, I would agree with your analysis that this gray zone, so to speak, is not sustainable in the long term and does invite Russian aggression. And so the question is whether Ukraine can exit the gray zone, so to speak, and be more firmly part of the western security architecture only with NATO membership? Or whether there are other, let's say, interim steps that could build Ukraine into the fabric of western security institutions while the prospect of full membership and Article 5 is still, like you said just a few minutes ago, potentially years away again after the war, which we can't predict the length of that. So I wanted to kind of shift a little bit to this issue of kind of interim arrangements.

From what we've read in the press, various western countries are having a pretty serious discussion about designing a robust interim security framework that would consist of a long-term western commitment to train and equip the Ukrainian military with a substantial defense and deterrence capability. And for more information, I'd refer our listeners to a couple of recent papers, including one that I wrote on the Carnegie website, envisioning what this framework could look like. Inspired, let's say, by the US commitment to Israel's security, which is outside of any formal alliances. Ultimately the idea for this kind of interim framework came from a Ukrainian proposal called the Kyiv Security Compact, which was issued last September by your boss Andriy Yermak and former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. So I guess, what is your thinking on the value of this multilateral interim security framework and what concretely Ukraine would like to see?

Because it seems like even if there were, let's say, a qualitative change in NATO's language at Vilnius, that still doesn't concretely make any additional guarantees to Ukraine's ability to wage the war in a protracted scenario. So whereas this other package of measures potentially could come with very, very serious bilateral commitments, like the United States has with Israel. Over a period of many years or a decade to be committed to building a future Ukrainian force that's capable of repelling Russian aggression and deterring a future repeated attack. So what would you say Ukraine is looking for in this sort of multilateral interim package?

Ihor Zhovkva:

Thank you, Eric, for bringing this very important topic as well to our discussion. Yeah, right you are. We were having this suggestion of Kyiv Security Compact and this suggestion and this proposal; Ukraine is on the tables of all top leaders of our top allies and partners; we are really serious about security guarantees or commitments. Again, not only for my country, but since we're talking about Ukrainians, I'm speaking as a Ukrainian representative, yes, again, membership to NATO is the best security guarantee for my country. We throughout 30 years of Ukraine's independence, many different leaders of Ukraine, previous presidents were trying and playing with this notion of neutrality on alignment, and we saw what happened. So once again, the best security for Ukraine, the best security guarantee is Article 5. But before that, and this is the narrative we're talking to you about, it'll not happen immediately. But the war is going on now and we need the security commitments before the victory of Ukraine, during the victory of Ukraine and after the victory of Ukraine, before membership to NATO. It's nothing new in this notion, in this security commitment.

We simply do not want to repeat the mistake of the leaders in Ukraine who signed or subscribed to the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, giving up the third-largest nuclear potential in the world on our good merits. And thinking that this memorandum will guarantee that in case of aggression or even threat of aggression, we are having a strong mechanism of securing Ukraine. Unfortunately, then in 2014 we tried to implement this and then, strange as it is, one of the security guarantors was the country who later became an aggressor against my country. So, definitely this time talking with our partners on the possible security commitments for my country, we want them to be as real as possible. And there is nothing in these security guarantees which is not rendered as of now because when providing Ukraine

with the military equipment, artillery systems, best in battle tanks and armor vehicles, air defense systems. Hopefully a quick decision or future decision on fighter jets.

Now very good decisions are being made on the training. These are in fact the security guarantees, real security guarantees or commitments we're talking about. Or when introducing new sanctions against Russia or having the strict understanding that if the level of aggression raises significantly or after the victory, Russia would think of renewing the aggression. Immediate sanction, just immediate sanction. Increasingly severe sanctions would follow is also the security guarantees, financial assistance, macro financial assistance coming from the EU. Or financial assistance and support and laws coming from the individual countries such as US, UK is also part of security commitments. What is very important is to have a coordinated system of how countries do react if the level of aggression increases or if aggression renews after the victory. And right you are, the multi-multilateral document could be a very important start of this providing those guarantees and right you are the bilateral agreements might follow.

I will not speculate here and well on this, sorry, this is a very delicate negotiation process we're now undertaking with some of the countries; it's very important to have this as soon as possible. But at the same time, it's very important to understand that these security guarantees, if provided to Ukraine, cannot in any case deviate us from our utmost goal, which is membership in NATO. It is a very important instrument, and we value the efforts our partners are making to negotiate it with us. Sometimes it needs a change of positions, sometimes a change of necessary legislation or financial arrangements. And we're thankful for the countries who have already committed to negotiate it with us and are holding these negotiations. And potential countries who have expressed their will to join the circle of the country guarantors to Ukraine. It is very important, it is really needed now, immediately. Once again, when talking to those countries, we thank them for their efforts and hope that these security commitments will be introduced as soon as possible.

I do reiterate and remember that the best security guarantee - and this time real guarantee - for my country would be Article 5. While the Israeli model you mentioned is very good, it's really one of the best examples of how the US guarantees the security of one of its strongest strategic partners. But why this model does not 100% fit to Ukraine, because I haven't heard that Israel would like to become a member of NATO. I heard that Israel has MNNA status and there were some suggestions for Ukraine to also opt for MNNA status. And there were serious discussions among the expert community and the political community in Ukraine to rather opt for these statues. But my president, once again to reiterate, after the 30th of September last year, said there cannot be any discussions of any potential statutes for my country in the foreseeable future rather than full-fledged membership of Ukraine to NATO.

Eric Ciaramella:

And just for our listeners who aren't familiar, MNNA is Major Non-NATO Ally status and it's usually thought of as an alternative to NATO membership. So again, getting to... I know you can't reveal any details about these diplomatic negotiations, but I want to talk more about the framing of the credibility of these commitments. Because I think the central objective with all of these efforts is to change the calculus of Vladimir Putin who thinks right now that time is on his side. And he thinks that he can wait until at some point in the future, let's say the west loses interest or attention or whatever. And so part of this effort is to persuade him that actually time doesn't work to his advantage. And that's where it gets into the credibility of our commitment here.

And again, you have an invitation to NATO membership that we discussed in the beginning of the conversation, which could be one signal of an action down the line, which would be accession. Although again, it's hard to predict because all of those things are contingent on how the war goes. This parallel track, again, not an alternative, but a parallel track on the Israel model is something that can be

implemented now as you just explained. With a multilateral framework document and then these bilateral commitments which take what Ukraine's partners have been doing for the last year and a half and codify them into a more predictable formal framework. So that it's not this ad hoc emergency aid where we don't know what's coming next and when.

So my question is from Ukraine's standpoint, what does a credible western commitment look like in terms of being in it with Ukraine for the long haul, for "as long as it takes", quote unquote, which is what western leaders frequently say. You mentioned a change in legislation. So that brings the issue of complicated US domestic politics into this, which we can't avoid talking about because the 2024 election is coming up and it does hold the prospect of a potential change in US policy and Putin seems to be banking on that possibility. So what needs to happen in advance in terms of codification in US law? Does it need to be a formal treaty? Are we talking just about some sort of bipartisan regular legislation? What would Ukraine like to see that would show that this kind of commitment to train and equip the Ukrainian armed forces is a credible one that is enduring?

Ihor Zhovkva:

Well, Eric, thank you. Let me react first. Yeah, right you are on what you said. Ukraine fatigue, that's what probably was the dream of Russia. By the way, I usually mentioned about three major miscalculation the Russian president made when making this decision about open aggression. He overestimated the strength of his armed forces. He underestimated the strength and the level of Ukrainian armed forces. And thirdly, which is also very important, he underestimated the level of unity around Ukraine of the international community. Maybe he was thinking about potential, sorry for this, but rather weak response in the beginning of his aggression in 2014 when there was an attempted occupation of Crimea.

Maybe he was expecting the same kind of reaction in 2022 and he severely mistook the level of unity around Ukraine. The level of immediate action to support Ukraine was tremendous, is tremendous and will be tremendous. Well, probably it's only in his mind and the mind of his propaganda people, Ukraine's fatigue and losing interest in the case of Ukraine. But coming back to this security commitment, I will give you one example from the beginning of this open aggression. Remember, in the first days and weeks, my president was asking allies, "Please protect the sky over Ukraine, close the sky over Ukraine. The rest we will do ourselves. They're rather good at fighting on the battlefield." But unfortunately, our capacities for protecting the sky of Ukraine are really limited. We remember these requests coming from my president and we also unfortunately remember almost absence of response at the beginning of this open aggression.

What do we have now? We have now several kinds of air defense systems for my country, both short range and medium range. And already now we see the results. We have a joke that the best advertisement for the Patriot system was made in Ukraine when the Patriot system intercepted the Kinzhal supersonic missile. Now everyone knows the capabilities of Patriot, what types of missiles it can intercept. So we have the state-of-the-art air defense systems, definitely we need more and that's the issue of negotiations of my president. But each and every leader of the country who has it or is able to produce or is able to buy or is able to deliver, again, we'll not speculate here in the open area. When we're talking about fighter jets, we're talking about them to be, yes, a means to dominate in the sky.

Because Russian aviation is much more significant in numbers and in quantity and in the quality than the existing aviation part of Ukraine. But they also can become a part of our air defense system because where there's a lack of air defense systems, the fighter jets are now being used to intersect the cruise missile, the drones. And sometimes they attack in waves, one by one they attack with cruise missiles,

with ballistic missiles, with drones, sometimes simultaneously. So, this is the security guarantees I'm now talking, in case of worsening the situation, not again, there will be demand or request of my president to protect and close the sky for instance. But we will already know that the sky is protected as of now by concrete means and it will be more severely protected if the aggression rises. This is the idea, very simple.

Eric Ciaramella:

Yes. I mean I think that's kind of the conceptual change that has happened over the past 16 months, which is that a guarantee is less about promising some future action in response to some worse thing that Russia does. But rather codifying what's already being done to change the long-term dynamic such that the advantage that Russia has in certain areas like artillery and air power, that advantage will erode over time. It's not going to happen overnight, but with a long-term commitment to let's say producing sufficient air defense systems and making sure that Ukraine has them. Producing sufficient artillery munitions, making sure Ukraine has them. And making clear as a signal to Russia that Ukraine is going to have more air defense and more artillery munitions with every passing year. That's where you start to potentially change his dynamic about how a protracted war may or may not work in his favor, rather than only focusing on actions that would be taken at some future date if he does something even worse.

So, I think that in my view, it's actually extremely valuable, this whole discussion about multilateral security commitments. And it's a bit unfortunate, I think, that some of the commentary here, I would say in Washington, just to be self-reflective, has been pretty dismissive of this idea of saying, "Well, it's just paper guarantees and all of that." And it's not, I mean what we're talking about here is a major, major armament program over a long term, something like we haven't seen since the United States did for the nations of Western Europe after World War II and at the onset of the Cold War. We're talking very serious capabilities over a long time. And I think that this can be communicated as a pretty clear signal to Russia that again, the longer they fight, the worse their position is going to get. It's not immediate, but the deterrence effect of it takes effect over time.

Ihor Zhovkva:

Yeah, Eric, thank you, I would like to pick up the point of this rearmament program. By the way, let me even go back. I think this Russian open aggression against my country and the level of support we're receiving both from us and from our European partners. But let's take the situation, I think this aggression forced many countries to make their own security checks. What are the security situation and the level of industry and the level of military industry in their respective countries? And right you are, many countries are extensively supporting Ukraine by giving practically everything they have in this or that kind of weapons. And thinking that since Russia will always be crazy, we need to think of opening the new producing lines or renewing the existing lines or maybe starting some new developments, new industries. Together, by the way, with the Ukrainian industry, Ukraine military industry has a huge potential.

Let me remind you that we were always in the top 10 in CEPR by the level and the amount of weapons sold, state-of-the-art equipment. And we still have these capacities, we still have those professionals. We are ready to join our efforts in opening, join producing lines, opening new manufacturing facilities. Unfortunately, probably on the obvious reason not in Ukraine or maybe not on the whole territory of Ukraine, you will not probably obviously open it on the occupied areas. Maybe somewhere close to the western border of my country with the country's neighbors in the EU or somewhere very close to the territory of Ukraine. And this would be mutual but mutually beneficial for us because, yes, we will need

more weapons but for the countries of the European continent as well as the US, because we all need to be on alert from now on.

The situation will never be, it will not be returning to the status quo, what we had before the Russian aggression. And second point, you asked me about the election situations. We certainly hate that the issue of supporting Ukraine would become an internal issue and I'm sure it'll not be because what we hear when the delegations of Congress are coming and senate are coming to Ukraine, they are always coming bipartisan. And we feel, we really feel these are not words of bipartisan support. We are absolutely ready to insert any possible, any oversight mechanisms over the delivery of US weaponry to Ukraine, which are needed. My president and I'm president on these meetings of his with Congress and Senate delegations is suggestion. Please have all the necessary oversight mechanisms you think possible or impossible and we are ready for them. We can make a report on each and every dollar spent on delivering military equipment to Ukraine.

We can make a report on each and every piece of military equipment delivered to Ukraine. It's not somewhere in the storage, in the warehouses. It is immediately being distributed to the hottest points of the battlefield. We are not storing this weaponry. Sometimes I must at the interviews, whether the weaponry is enough as of now, answer is very clear. It would be enough then we will at least win the war because we're not storing the ammunition which is coming from US or from the countries. We immediately used this ammunition, this artillery ammunition or tank ammunition to defend like it was in several operations in the Donbas. And now when we're having these counteroffensive operations, we use it, but we use it in much smaller amounts than Russia uses. I don't believe these speculations of Mr. Prigozhin's, that they have a lack of ammunition or whatever.

No, they have plenty of ammunition, all Soviet type ammunition, which by the way Ukraine was also using, but we are running out of this Soviet type of munition of 122, 152. And we can no longer replace it because the production lines are not working in Ukraine. So that's why we definitely, we are sure, and we would like to hope that the issue of supports to Ukraine will not divide any country or any institutions. We always say that we united the European Union over the case of Ukraine, when a year ago there was a lot of speculation, probably of the same intensity as we see today surrounding the NATO issue. Over the issue of giving the candidate statues for my country in the EU. A month before decision, most of the experts will tell you Ukraine, Ukraine will never get a candidate statue. There are some countries who are strongly against, I'm not sure what it'll bring, additional value, what Putin will think or whatever.

Exactly a year ago, on the 23rd of June, we were granted candidate status. We have been given a secondary recommendation on how to improve our situation in terms of judicial reform, legislative improvements in many areas and the oligarch reform rule of law. We've now received the interim evaluation, the oral report from the commission saying that we are in a very good progress. Two of these recommendations have already closed, four are making very good progress and just one with some progress. And by the way, these democratic and judicial reforms coincide with the reforms which are needed to become a part of NATO, and we are making them. In NATO, you also have this security sector and defense and military reform. We are having them, I just know: check the numbers, very interesting numbers about the level of adopting the NATO standards, 10 X. During the war only in 2022 and in the first half of 2023 we implemented 131 NATO standards, compared to the 151 standards we implemented before the open war.

So, in terms of war, practically had the same number of NATO standards implemented in our system as throughout all the years before the war. And we will be doing this, and we'll be proceeding with the reforms. But once again, the European Union showed the unity around the case of Ukraine and they are now having this unity in opening, probably this year, the accession negotiations for my country. We

hope for the same unity in NATO. We do understand and do well the unity in NATO. And we do know that the decisions in NATO are taken by consensus. And you already have the consensus among the 31 countries of NATO. Each and every country supports us by its own means, by its own equipment, by its own levels of support you have, each and every country. You cannot name any single country in NATO which doesn't support us. Hungary supports us, yes, humanitarian support, hosting our people. Every country supports us, and we haven't heard from any country that Ukraine should not become a member to NATO. So, this is the level of unity we are expecting from your countries in regards of Ukraine.

Eric Ciaramella:

Thank you. Well, we're just at an hour now and I want to be respectful of your time and your busy schedule. I guess I'll just ask you one quick final question. Since you mentioned Mr. Prigozhin, does Ukraine see what happened in Russia last weekend as a game changer in terms of Ukraine's assessment of the stability of the Russian regime and Putin's strength or weakness? Or is Ukraine more cautious? Because certainly the narrative that's been here in the United States, there's a lot of people saying this is the beginning of the inevitable end and so on and so forth. At the same time, it seems like we should be a little realistic that we could be dealing with Mr. Putin for quite a long time. So, what's Ukraine's official understanding of the implications of what happened?

Ihor Zhovkva:

Well, right you are. We should be very cautious of what is taking place in Russia and what is the outcomes of the situation of this attempted coup or whatever you call it, mutiny or whatever. I cannot personally see or think about any possible positive aftermath for Russia itself after the events of last Saturday. Well, obviously, it showed the weakness of the system, the absence of reaction in critical situations. And even if we speculate about this or that scenario, the outcomes are only negative. But honestly for us, even though we don't have the time to analyze the tendencies, what is going on within the Russian power, we know that still there is one person who makes the decision, that makes the ultimate decisions. What is more important for us is what implication these events are having on the situation on the battlefield.

What will be the morale - which is already not so high - what will be the morale of Russian soldiers after these events, of the Russian military command, of different groups and systems of people. Because yes, we have the armed forces, yes, we still have this Wagner group and they are still present, unfortunately, in the occupied areas, occupied territories of Ukraine. What will be the level of coordination between them? And again, I cannot tell you here in an open manner because it's something which will definitely have negative implications for Russian armed forces' experience on the battlefield. And Ukrainian armed forces will be simply doing their job. They will be proceeding with a counteroffensive operation and operations. Obviously, that which is taking place now is not the first counteroffensive operation. We have witnessed several counteroffensive operations of our armed forces. And each of them was different from the previous one.

The counteroffensive around northern areas of Ukraine was different from the next counteroffensive, which was around Kharkiv and Izyum. And what happened later on around Kherson was different from the previous several. What we'll be doing now, we'll be fulfilling our case. We will be achieving our ultimate goal, which is like I already said, liberation of all the territories. We'll be working with our partners, with the US and with like-minded partners to have a further level of support in terms of military support, equipment and ammunition. And definitely altogether we'll be bringing the successful case of victory. But once again, after what happened, we should even be on more alert about what is happening inside Russia. We should be on more alert about what will be happening in Belarus. My

president has already talked with presidents of Poland and Lithuania who just visited Kyiv the day before yesterday. And they were discussing how to strengthen the security in this region because both countries are having their borders, Belarus and what Russia is [inaudible 01:05:02].

So, again, I cannot be open here, but we will be coordinating our efforts. Once again, Ukraine is ready to take its part of responsibility in this part of the world. After having the victory, we will stay here; we'll have even stronger armed forces. We will have strong courage and will and knowledge of how to win. And we just want to share this courage and strength and will and experience with our like-minded partners, with NATO countries. I just in the end mentioned, we examined the opinion polls in the allies and the countries. By the way, we conducted the same exercise before receiving candidate status. What percent of the population supported, in this case, Ukraine becoming a member to NATO. And even among the most, let's call them still undecided countries, the level of support for Ukraine joining NATO is more than 50%. So, the same like my president cannot go against the will of the population in Ukraine. Again, 82% support it.

I think we could also count on the level of support of the population, of the leaders of the allies, for Ukraine sooner or later to become a full-fledged member to the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance. It would be mutually beneficial. I found a very good quote in the Madrid Declaration about Finland and Sweden. It was written that the accession of Finland and Sweden will make them safer, NATO stronger, and the Euro-Atlantic area more secure. We can easily replace the names of these two countries with Ukraine. The accession of Ukraine will make Ukraine safer, definitely, NATO stronger, definitely, and the Euro-Atlantic area more secure, more than definitely.

Eric Ciaramella:

Well, thank you very much for your generosity with your time on this Friday afternoon and for this really enlightening discussion. I think it's been very informative to our audiences here in Washington and around the world that tuned in. So, we hope to have you again soon for another event. And thanks to all of our listeners, we hope you have a nice weekend, and you'll tune in for future events. Thank you very much, Ihor.

Ihor Zhovkva:

Many thanks. Thank you for having me.

Eric Ciaramella:

Take care.