

# 7 POINTS ON THE WAR AND DIALOGUE FROM UKRAINIAN MEDIATORS AND DIALOGUE FACILITATORS

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**THIS DOCUMENT WAS DEVELOPED BY UKRAINIAN MEDIATORS AND DIALOGUE FACILITATORS** to convey their voice and professional opinion to major actors in the international sphere of conflict transformation. We are very grateful to the governments and people of the partner-countries for their unprecedented support of Ukraine in these hard times. We rely on the equal agency of Ukraine in relation to its international partners that accounts for both the local context and the reality of the current war in Ukraine. This document presents a view from inside, one that is bottom-up and is thus different from external, top-down perspectives prevalent in the international community of mediation and dialogue experts.

**We appeal to** the diplomatic corps of foreign countries, international intergovernmental organisations such (UN, EU, OSCE), international non-governmental organisations and individual consultants, donor agencies working in peacebuilding, mediation and dialogue as well as other actors.

**Mediation and dialogue are rooted** in conflict resolution approaches focused on human interests, needs and values and that seek to create alternatives to power-based methods. At a time when Ukraine is forced to defend its values by weapons, we consider it necessary to continue working to strengthen social cohesion based on principles of humanity and humanism. That said, we cannot condemn the use of force when it is required to protect the country and its people. We must find new, creative approaches that take into account both of these factors: the use of force as well as nonviolent means of resolving conflicts.

With this in mind, the Ukrainian community of mediation and dialogue experts desires to emphasize the following points with regards to the place of dialogue in the context of the war in Ukraine:

**1. The armed aggression of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine.** The armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which began in February 2014 and has continued with a large-scale invasion that began in February 2022, is not only an attempt by Russia to regain territories which were long under its colonial oppression, but also to revive an international system based on the use of force. For Ukraine, this war is a continuation of a decolonization struggle for independence and

territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders, as well as for a new international security architecture which is capable of defending values such as human rights, human dignity, democracy and the rule of law: the cornerstones of the post-World War II world order.

**2. The necessity for and the content of negotiation process at the highest political level (Track One).** In this war, the people of Ukraine are facing mass killings of civilians by the Russian military, targeted destruction of civilian infrastructure and shelters and open terror against civilians, all of which has already caused a humanitarian catastrophe in the centre of Europe. The task of highest priority is to resolve humanitarian issues, to increase support to Ukraine by the partner-countries, to strengthen the Armed Forces of Ukraine by supplying weapons meant to protect civilians from hostilities, and to increase pressure by means of sanctions on the aggressor-state. At the same time, it is necessary to use diplomatic means (soft power), namely holding talks at the highest level (Track One) between the warring parties on issues such as ceasefires, providing humanitarian corridors and opportunities for the evacuation of the population, the exchange of imprisoned military and civilian persons as well as Ukrainian citizens that were forcefully relocated from Ukraine to Russia and Belarus, conditions for stopping the war that are acceptable to Ukraine and other issues. The involvement of experts and representatives of civil society from Ukraine and Russia/Belarus in Track One negotiation processes during active hostilities has its own peculiarities and therefore requires the development of specific approaches and mechanisms.

**3. Dialogue between citizens of Ukraine, Russia and Belarus at lower levels (Tracks Two and Three) during active hostilities, at any location, is not appropriate to the current phase of the conflict nor does it reflect the principle of “do no harm.”**

- The people of Ukraine are currently fighting for survival and have to cope with extreme levels of stress caused by a very real threat to their lives. Accordingly, all their efforts are directed to overcoming the challenges presented by the war inside Ukraine, and any contacts with people who represent the aggressor can have a traumatic effect. The expectations that, in this state, people can actively listen and understand others, which are necessary components of dialogue, are unrealistic.

- The hot phase of the war, as well as the exposure of war crimes and the mass killings of civilians in Russian-occupied territories, has led to a reaction of self-defense and resistance within the people of Ukraine, increasing aggression towards Russia and everything Russian. In this phase of the war, the collective image of the enemy naturally generalizes all Russians, especially against the backdrop of available information on the high public support of the Russian population for this large-scale invasion of Ukraine. This aggression and hatred are functional: they help to gather and consolidate the necessary energy to survive and uphold one's own values. Such conditions make it impossible to initiate dialogue, in the classical sense, with a party whose army is currently actively attacking and generating threat. The offer of dialogue for Ukrainians in this context can be perceived as a form of psychological violence.
- Dialogue can have negative consequences in conditions of significant asymmetry, such as those which exist in current armed conflict. No hostilities are taking place on the territory of Russia – no violence, war crimes or crimes against humanity are committed against civilians of the Russian Federation. Furthermore, members of civil society active in the territory of the aggressor state are currently unable to influence neither government actions nor the context. Such asymmetry leads to the absence of a subject for dialogue and can even further increase tensions.
- The active use of narratives of "peace" in Russian propaganda since 2014, gives serious grounds to consider that they will also rely on this tactics now. Dialogue, right now, needs to be protected from being used for propaganda or for ideological purposes by the regime of the aggressor state.

Therefore conventional, facilitated, grassroots dialogues between people from Ukraine, Russia and/or Belarus during active hostilities can retraumatize participants and have a high risk of generating a negative image of dialogue in the society. Accordingly, they should not be initiated without involving Ukrainian mediation and dialogue experts in their design and implementation.

**4. The current place of dialogue and mediation is primarily within the internal Ukrainian context and within Ukraine's relations with partner countries.** Dialogue and dialogue approaches can and should be used as a tool to strengthen resilience, social cohesion and unity within Ukrainian society, and these should be supported even during the hot phase of the conflict. Additionally, there is a need to strengthen horizontal dialogue on the international level: between citizens as well as various groups

and expert communities in Ukraine with their international counterparts, both during active hostilities and afterwards, regarding work on common humanitarian and value-based challenges, building regional partnerships and other issues.

**5. Support to the citizens of Russia and Belarus.** We understand the need to provide direct support to the citizens of Russia and Belarus who are fighting against authoritarian regimes and the armed aggression against Ukraine initiated by them. Other than dialogue, several forms of communication and interaction between citizens of Ukraine and Russia/Belarus are possible and currently active, but their use also depends on the course of the war.

**6. The importance of authentic Ukrainian voices and local ownership when applying dialogue approaches.** Since 2014, Ukrainian experts have developed and used unique methodologies, techniques and tools of dialogue which they have adapted to local contexts and different phases of the ongoing war. The direct application of peace-building and dialogue approaches from other contexts has not proved viable without having adapted them to the realities of Ukraine. Without conflict sensitivity, Ukrainian ownership and a thorough study and analysis of successful practices, Ukraine is in danger of becoming a laboratory for the implementation of inappropriate approaches.

**7. Ukrainian mediation and dialogue experts have highly developed capacities and are currently ready to:**

- **invest their efforts into development of the conditions under which it will be possible to convene potential dialogue** at the level of civil society in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. Such conditions can, for example, include the following: the recognition of responsibility for aggression against Ukraine by the political leadership and societies of Russia and Belarus; the initiation of transitional justice processes, in particular the process of bringing to accountability those guilty of war crimes, crimes against humanity, aggression and genocide, as well as other serious crimes committed during the Russian invasion of the territory of Ukraine; securing dialogues from their use for manipulative purposes; ensuring the physical safety and security of participants in dialogue processes, etc.;
- **study and adapt available conceptual approaches and formats of dialogues** taking into account the context of the current war in Ukraine;
- **initiate the development of methodologies and approaches to the design** of prospective dialogue processes.

**INITIATED BY:**

1. Association of Family Mediators of Ukraine
2. "Dialogue in Action" Initiative, Kyiv
3. Institute for Peace and Common Ground, Kyiv
4. Laboratory of Peaceful Initiatives, Kharkiv
5. League of Mediators of Ukraine
6. National Association of Mediators of Ukraine
7. Odesa Regional Mediation Group, Odesa
8. Community of Dialogue Facilitators of Ukraine
9. Ukrainian Mediation Center, Kyiv
10. Center for Mediation and Dialogue Research, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Kyiv
11. Center for Law and Mediation, Kharkiv
12. School of Mediation, Kyiv
13. Facilitation Park, Kyiv

**SUPPORTED BY:**

14. "DecisionLab" Mediation Agency, Kyiv
15. Bukovyna Mediation Center, Chernivtsi
16. Commercial Mediation Group, Boryspil
17. Lviv Mediation Center, Lviv
18. International Training Center "My Action", Pyriatyn
19. Educational and Scientific Laboratory of Mediation, Negotiation and Arbitration, Chernivtsi
20. National Platform for Resilience and Social Cohesion
21. Podilsky Mediation Center, Vinnytsia
22. Prydniprovsky Mediation Center, NGO Peace Space "Free", Dnipro
23. Theater of Change, Kyiv
24. Ukrainian Network of Dialogue Facilitators
25. Ukrainian Academy of Mediation, Odesa
26. Intellectum Arti, Kyiv
27. Sense 2 Sense Communication, Kyiv

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a mediator and facilitator with 30 years of experience in conflict transformation in Ukraine and other countries,  
who worked with us on this document.

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