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Volodymyr Zelenskyy: 'high chance' of ending war in Ukraine 'this year'

**Володимир Зеленський: «висока ймовірність» припинення війни в Україні «в цьому році»**

*Президент України Володимир Зеленський дав інтерв'ю французькому тижневику «Euronews».*

<https://www.euronews.com/2020/08/25/volodymyr-zelenskyy-high-chance-of-ending-war-in-ukraine-this-year>

It has been just over a year since [Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#) surprised the world by winning a landslide victory in Ukraine's presidential election with over 70% of the ballot.

"I will never let you down" the former actor turned politician said, as he took office.

His best known role was playing the President of Ukraine in the TV show 'Servant Of The People'. This also became the name of the party created two years ago that Zelenksyy led to victory when he was elected in April 2019.

I arrived in Kyiv to sit down for a rare interview with the president and ask him about his first year in office and of the challenges of running a country of 42 million people. In the past decade, that country has seen a revolution, the annexation of Crimea and an ongoing armed conflict in the east; a conflict which the president claimed, during the course of our interview, had a 'high chance' of ending this year.

**"An ordinary citizen"**

I began by pointing out to President Zelenskyy that it was over a year since he won the election, at which he expressed his amazement:

"Time flies so fast. Lots of things to do, lots of stuff, lots of different results, to be honest. But it feels like it was yesterday.

"There are lots of different problems when you are just an ordinary citizen.

"I said it already and it is true that I will always be just an ordinary person. What is very important to me is when I am no longer a president of Ukraine, I will still be able to walk down the streets. Not only in Kyiv, but all over Ukraine.

"The best result would be if people are proud of me, but even without this, at least I want people to say 'hello' to me. I hope they won't feel like saying something unpleasant to me or the worst thing – I hope people won't feel like spitting in my face.

He says his conduct has been very much with posterity in mind:

"What has been remarkable over this time, just over a year, whatever I've done - I did it in a way not to be ashamed of.

"All I do, I do it in a way that my kids won't be ashamed of and most importantly, so that my parents aren't ashamed. For me, that is most important.

"Other than that it is simple. Apart from strategic problems, a president has to sort out everyday challenges."

### **War in the east**

"You know about the war in the east – it doesn't stop, it's not like a working week, when it's 5 days a week.

"The war is happening 24/7 and every day, there are challenges and issues. They need answers that bring results and steps forward.

"Because then, it depends on those steps how many people died, how many were injured.

"And how many lives you personally, the President of Ukraine, can save. No matter how you do it: phone calls, going to the frontline.

"I know that when I am at the frontline, they won't shoot; they are afraid. That is why I am always telling anyone from the government or anyone from the presidential office, any authorities - go to the frontline. Why? Because they won't open fire that much."

Since the negotiations restarted about the situation in the east in the [Normandy Format](#) (so-called because Germany, Russia, Ukraine and France were the four powers who met informally during the D-Day celebration in Normandy) at the Paris summit in December last year, Mr Zelenskyy said that he was allowing one year to get results. With just a few months to go, I asked him what the current situation was - and what progress has been achieved in this one year deadline?

He insisted it was moving forward:

"It is moving, but not as fast as I expected. But now there's a ceasefire. There will be a Normandy format meeting.

"Also, there was the [prisoner exchange](#). We have agreed on the disengagement sites and 20 de-mining sites, which is very important.

"How much more time is needed? I don't know. I think the second Normandy format meeting means that there's a high chance of ending the war."

I asked him when, which caused him to pause for a while.

"As soon as possible. I want to believe that it will be this year. I really want to believe it and I DO believe, I do. If it was only up to me, if it depended only on me...

"I don't want to give you names now, but compared with the previous team, no-one wanted it as much as I do, not even close to as much. No one has done as much in terms of speeding up the process and putting pressure on it.

"And everyone sees it! And I don't mean only us here in Ukraine. Our partners see it, our foreign partners. All of them see it.

"I do know that no-one can end (the war) faster than me."

"There is still a bit of time as you said and as I promised. That is why I want to move forward this way. And if it doesn't work – then we will think about other options."

I mentioned that his establishment of a direct dialogue with [Russian President Vladimir Putin](#) had caused controversy in Ukraine and asked him if he was still in touch with the Russian leader:

"Yes I am, when it's needed. I have had a talk with the Russian president right before a ceasefire went into force ([on 27 July](#)).

"We discussed the complicated issues in respecting the ceasefire.

"So far, there is a result of this dialogue and we see it. It is not enough. I am not afraid of the direct dialogue with Russia's president. I think that is the right thing to do.

"If we have a possibility to talk and the results of those talks can help move forward toward ending the war, it has to be done, no matter how different people or different regions react to this.

"If there is no dialogue, there will be no result. This I understand very clear. If there is no dialogue, if there are no phone calls when needed, there will be no peaceful result. I am convinced of it.

### **Crimea situation**

While the Minsk process and the Normandy format talks are concerned with the situation in the east of Ukraine, I asked President Zelensky about the processes and the status of negotiations regarding Crimea and its annexation:

"When it comes to Crimea, the situation is even more complicated, I think.

"I will tell you honestly, I have thought a lot about it. In the Normandy format, no one wants to talk about Crimea, especially Russia. I raised this issue. But we have dedicated all the time to Donbass.

"Russia does not want to talk about it and I am not afraid of saying that, we all understand it. We shouldn't have let them take Crimea. That is a big problem. We just shouldn't have.

"But today we can't be kicking ourselves about how it happened. I am sure that one day, everyone will be held responsible for it. Many people participated in it.

"But Crimea is our territory. We will bring it back. But there is no serious and efficient platform to discuss it, apart from our international talks and agreements with our foreign partners that resulted in sanctions and pressure on Russia for the illegal annexation of Crimea.

"The former president ([Petro Poroshenko](#)) said that things were moving forward and a lot had been done to bring Crimea back. Indeed there are cases in court, there are international talks. But I am telling you honestly – as of now there is no strong platform to raise this issue.

"And I think that a platform like this has not been created over the 6 years, it doesn't exist. Except sanctions, and I am very grateful to our partners for these sanctions. We have been discussing them and our partners are extending these sanctions. That is not just Europe, but also the US and other countries that are helping a lot.

"Am I going to do something else? Yes, I am."

I asked him if the situation in the east had priority over Crimea:

"Both issues are a priority. The only thing about the situation in the east, people are dying there. So with this particular human factor, for me personally this is in first place.

"But they are at the same level, because both territories are ours, they have to come back."

I asked him when they would come back:

"You know how they sometimes say in movies, 'You'll be the first one to find out!'"

### **Relations with President Trump**

I mentioned that there had been a lot of attention outside of Ukraine over the past year that had been paid to his relationship with US President Donald Trump. This has involved ongoing [allegations that President Trump and his team attempted to coerce Ukraine](#) into investigating 2020 Democratic Party presidential primary candidate Joe Biden and his son.

"I had a meeting with Donald Trump. I am very grateful to him, to his team and in general I am very grateful for the bipartisan US support for Ukraine.

"They are really supporting Ukraine and it is not only about the military aid which they have increased and our military drills with the NATO, our naval drills and also how they support us geopolitically and with the sanctions.

"For example, they really supported us when it came to the [Nord Stream 2 pipeline](#). The US are doing a lot for Ukraine. And I am really grateful to them as a Ukrainian citizen firstly and then as president.

"That is why intervening in the US presidential election - that is the biggest mistake any leader of any other independent state can make. It is their choice."

I asked him if there was anything else behind the scenes regarding the situation with President Trump.

"With all the state leaders I meet, there is always something behind the scenes, always. That's normal, because there are lots of things that cannot be just told like this. Because some of them are strategic. Is there a Plan B or Plan C - yes there is. Can I tell you about it? No, I cannot. Why? because then it will not happen. It's as simple as that. It is just unnecessary information."

### **Relations with the European Union**

Speaking about partnerships and Ukraine's relations with other countries, I asked him about Ukraine's relationship with the European Union and his quote that 'Ukraine demands full EU membership and the current format is not enough'. I asked him if he felt that the EU was somehow keeping its distance:

"I think the European Union does want Ukraine to be a partner and it does want Ukraine in the EU. Not all the EU member states want it, it is true, not all countries. It seems to me that they are not 100% confident in Ukraine.

"Secondly, I think Europe is cautious about [Russia](#), because Russia demonstrates that it doesn't want Ukraine to be pro-European. They have their own business going on, their own relations.

"But we see today how Europe acts with sanctions, how Europe supports us. Even if it means losing money because of sanctions against Russia. I am grateful to them for this.

"I think, what is important for the Ukrainian people is to make Europe's position on Ukraine 100% clear. And I asked many European leaders this question - what do you want Ukrainians to do, step by step, to become an EU member?

"And when the Ukrainians get this answer, they'll see how much time we need for it, if we are able to do it all and when we will do it.

"What is needed is the clear understanding that we need that right now. Both Ukraine and Europe need it now.

"On whether Europe wants us, whether we want to be with Europe - I think we just have to become the country that Europe really would want. And then no one will have any doubt and Ukraine will be the one to decide."

### **Belarus unrest**

Our discussion turned to the ongoing protests in Belarus, which have been increasingly compared to the revolution in Ukraine a few years ago. I asked him if he saw similarities:

"I wouldn't want them to have similar events to what we had in 2014. I don't want the [Belarus](#) people to die, I don't want them to be shot dead or to have some other serious bloodshed caused by the government.

"Secondly, I really think that it is not too late for the authorities and the society to start a dialogue. The (election) result does not matter. Here, it is not about the result. It is about the way to the result. This way should not be paved with blood.

"And the third thing which I can tell you honestly, but I won't say it as the president of Ukraine: I absolutely do not want to intervene in the Belarus election and I will not do it. Ukraine will not intervene. It is really their politics."

I asked him what we would do if he was Belarus President [Alexander Lukashenko](#):

"I would definitely say 'in one month there will be a new vote. And I am running for the new election. Whoever wants to run - go ahead!'

"I would invite everyone, all international observers, all of them! I'd invite the Germans, Ukrainians, Russians, Kazakhs, Azeri, Americans, French - I would invite absolutely everyone! And I'd tell the Belarus people 'Please, elect whoever you want. '

"And after THAT result - there would be no more questions. I'm convinced about it.

"If Lukashenko would win - he'd win, if someone else would win - then it's someone else. But everyone would be calm, without blood, it would be fair and would make history."