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## **Ukraine-Russia: Negotiate Now!**

The extension of wars creates an unprecedented danger for the state of the world. Assuring peace and finding ways to solve armed conflicts is a fundamental duty of governments. Europe has a particular responsibility to start searching for ways to end the war that is taking place within its region – the war between Russia and Ukraine.

After more than two years of fighting, following the Russian invasion, the Ukraine-Russia war is in a kind of prolonged stalemate, with a continuous risk of a widening and deepening of war activities. Regardless of the aggressor's original aims and the victims' justified resistance, a rational understanding of the present situation would lead both sides to recognize that their goals cannot be achieved. It is now Europe's responsibility to contribute to stopping the war and helping develop the conditions for a just resolution.

Any possible resolution of the Ukraine-Russia war starts with both sides negotiating with each other, either directly or through intermediaries, whether about a ceasefire, arms supply, territorial integrity, or a lasting peaceful solution.

Efforts to bring the two sides to the negotiating table have been attempted in the past by third parties – notably by Turkey - with no results. On 9 March 2024 Pope Francis asked for negotiations to open. Now, on the eve of the elections for the European Parliament of June 2024, we have the opportunity to put the need for ending the war on the agenda of the European Union.

With the war in Ukraine, EU countries have expanded their activities in military fields – research, production, arms transfers, defence and security initiatives. EU governments have been increasingly involved in supplying Ukraine with more powerful weapons, intelligence, economic support. The risk of an escalation leading to episodes of confrontation between Russia and Europe's NATO countries is alarming. The presence of Russian, US, French and British nuclear weapons in Europe dramatically adds to the present danger.

The EU and European governments have so far refused to work for a negotiated end of the Ukraine-Russia war. In the current debate around the European elections, the issue of negotiations and a EU initiative for ending the war should be put on the agenda of candidates, political parties and governments, following up on the passionate call by Pope Francis. The next European Parliament should convene an exploratory conference involving the two parties, and start a discussion on a possible peace and security order in Europe after the Ukraine war. The goals of such talks could include re-humanising the conflict zones, reconstructing confidence, suggesting steps for scaling down tensions and violence, exploring ways for stopping the war. The prospects for the future have to include the protection of human rights, security guarantees, economic reconstruction, and a distancing from radical nationalism and militarism.

Such efforts would be welcomed by the estimated six million Ukrainians and one million Russians who left their countries since the start of the war. It would be important that such efforts are

supported by groups of Ukrainian and Russian citizens living in EU countries. Europe's civil society organisations of all types could be active participants – including religious institutions, social organisations, solidarity and peace groups, women's voices, youth groups, business networks, trade unions, scientific networks, cultural and sport bodies, media organisations, as well as individual artists, writers, intellectuals. We would like to see events calling for *Negotiations now!* organised during the European elections campaign. Actions of “diplomacy from below” will help create the conditions for such negotiations, also within Ukraine and Russia.

Nowhere is it written that peace and common security is a governmental affair only. In the end, peoples – also acting as citizens and voters – are those who can acquiesce to war or uphold peace.

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