



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

The Africa Peace Initiative – an inevitable failure



A peace plan for the war in Ukraine drafted by a group of several African states had little prospect for success, even before promoters travelled to Kyiv and Russia to present it.

The only encouragement for the authors of this initiative could be that they managed to visit both warring capitals and discuss the peace plan directly with the leaders of Ukraine and Russia. This has not been the case with some other peace efforts.

A seven-member African delegation brought a ten-point plan to Ukraine and Russia. They believed this would be a good basis for talks on ending the war.

There was not much optimism in Kyiv last Friday or in St. Petersburg a day later regarding the African paper and the possible peace it could bring.

The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, told the emissaries that any peace plan must first entail the withdrawal of Russian forces from the occupied zones in Ukraine, which is unacceptable for Moscow (for now).

The Kremlin explicitly rejected the plan, primarily because one of the points calls for respect of the UN Charter and the territorial integrity of its members. Vladimir Putin even interrupted the opening speeches of the African leaders while they listed the points of their plan.

"The peace initiative proposed by African countries is very difficult to implement, difficult to compare positions", said Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

Ten unenforceable points

The ten-point African initiative contains some elements that favour Kyiv, such as maintaining the inviolability of internationally recognised borders and unblocking Ukrainian grain exports from ports on the Black Sea.

There is also a proposal by the Africans to release prisoners of war and children taken to Russia from their homes in Ukraine.

The Russian side would be satisfied with the insistence of African mediators on the "de-escalation" of the conflict if it means that the Ukrainians stop resisting Russian aggression.

A call for both sides to stop the conflict is very pronounced. This disavows Ukraine's right to defend its country against external aggression, and places it in the same category as the aggressor.

The African peace paper is far from a plan because none of its points provide even a hint regarding implementation, let alone an action plan.

The division of Africa embedded in the initiative

Its biggest problem is that it reflects deep divisions amongst African nations over Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The continent is divided into supposedly neutral states and those that support Ukraine: that is, condemn Russian aggression, with a small number of those who openly stand behind the Russian war effort.

About half of the African UN members voted 'Yes' for two resolutions of the UN General Assembly, which condemned Russia for its

aggression and asked it to withdraw from Ukraine, while the other half either abstained or did not vote. Only Mali and Eritrea voted in favour of Russia.

The division was more pronounced during the vote on the expulsion of Russia from the UN Human Rights Council, where 24 out of the 54 African countries abstained.

This split regarding the war in Ukraine was also reflected in the African peace initiative, which was presented in Kyiv and St. Petersburg.

This document does not provide a new, thought-out diplomatic line. It only lists the pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian positions of African states, one after the other, probably with the idea that they will attract the attention of the parties to the conflict and open the door to the peace process. However, that has not happened.

Even the composition of the African delegation reflected the divisions on the Continent.

South Africa, Senegal and Uganda abstained from condemning Russia for the aggression, whilst Egypt, Zambia and Comoros (chair of the African Union) voted to condemn Russia at the UN last year.

South Africa without intermediary credibility

The African peace initiative did not have much chance of success because of the credibility of its representatives.

It is not realistic to expect that Kyiv would accept mediation from South Africa as the

most influential member of the peace group and the continent, given its closeness to Moscow.

Last February, on the anniversary of the Russian aggression, large naval manoeuvres with the armies of Russia and China were organised in South Africa. Pretoria was later subject to serious accusations from the US that it was illegally exporting weapons to Russia.

In addition to all of this, South Africa is preparing a new BRICS summit in August, and thus its role in any potential peace mediation in Ukraine is meaningless.

All participants in the peace initiative are familiar with these limitations, so the cold response of both Kyiv and Moscow to their plan should not be surprising.

Grain and artificial fertiliser – the only motive for the initiative

That is why the only more or less rational motive for the Africans could be in connection with stabilising the export of food and artificial fertilisers.

The crisis in the supply of food and fertilisers from Ukraine and Russia, as the largest global exporters, has hit Africa hard. Therefore, it is understandable that they came to Eastern Europe with this initiative.

Since this is only a matter of promoting peace and seeking peaceful solutions for Ukraine, it seems unconvincing, because they do not display this kind of effort to solve some of their local crises, for example, in Sudan.

Unhindered export of grains and fertilisers is a significant motive for joint action. This is, in fact, the only tangible reason why it would make sense for African countries to take joint action.

However, it would be pragmatic if they had only gone to Moscow on this business. since Russia is the main threat for the new supply crisis, as it constantly threatens to leave the grain deal, most recently just before their arrival in Russia.

"Camouflaging" the real reason in a general peace plan, where the food supply crisis is only one of the points, highlights the division within the African bloc, which does not enable them to have a more noticeable impact.