



By: The Editorial Board

Peace Summit in Switzerland – the glass is half full



Switzerland's **efforts** to bring the world together around a peace solution for Ukraine deserve enormous respect. The idea was inclusive from the start, with the intention of progressing rather than deepening the already existing global polarisation.

The host received broad support for the approach of reaching the end of the road in gradual, small, but significant steps that focus on humanitarian issues.

This **approach** was entirely in line with Switzerland's traditional military and diplomatic neutrality, which was also its greatest advantage as a mediator compared to many others in the world.

Yet the Swiss insist that "being neutral does not mean being indifferent." To what extent did it succeed in motivating everyone else to mitigate mutual differences and take responsibility for building peace?

Reports on the preparation and course of the Bürgenstock Conference repeatedly highlighted Russia's absence from the talks and the lack of invitation.

That was crucial because peace talks cannot take place without both sides at the table. However, it was not a handicap that could have derailed the entire project.

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In recent months, Moscow has made every effort to disavow the entire Swiss peace platform, particularly its final summit. The lobbying against participation appeared to be Moscow's most extensive diplomatic action since the start of its invasion of Ukraine.

The greatest success of this action was undoubtedly China's absence from the conference in Switzerland, but Moscow cannot attribute this circumstance solely to its own pressure.

In relations between Russia and China, particularly in its position on the war in Ukraine, it is Beijing that determines the degree of Chinese involvement, neutrality, or support for Moscow.

Beijing's calculations were primarily responsible for China's absence at the summit in Switzerland. This calculation took into account many other Chinese geopolitical interests, particularly those associated with its claim to leadership in developing countries and the global South.

We should not forget that China also has its own peace initiative for Ukraine. Despite the fact that this initiative has never received major international attention, Beijing is not giving up the option of being the principal mediator in achieving peace, especially when a "competing" project emerges, in this case a Swiss one.

Numbers

Of the 160 countries and international organisations invited, 92 countries and 8 international organisations participated in the summit. There were 57 heads of state and government, 30 foreign ministers, and 5 special envoys.

78 countries and four international organisations signed the final declaration.

This expands the circle of states that support Ukraine's call for a peaceful solution. Representatives of the EU, the G7, Brazil, India, South Africa, and Turkey participated at the conference in Copenhagen in June 2023.

At the end of last year, Saudi Arabia's initiative brought together around 40 countries, including China. The summit in Switzerland had double the number of participants and signatories to the final declaration.

Numbers are important because they say something about the legitimacy of a process. It is therefore not without reason that Russia deployed its diplomatic service in full force to

prevent countries around the world from attending the Swiss conference.

Vladimir Putin has practically admitted that he is under pressure

Despite the fact that the Swiss process received most of its support from the Western bloc, the participants also included states that emphasise their neutrality towards the Ukrainian crisis and have economic ties with Russia, such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Turkey. Russia's BRICS partners, India and South Africa, were also present, as was Brazil, albeit in an observer capacity.

The numbers, i.e., the legitimacy, undoubtedly have the function of putting Russia under pressure, no matter how much it tries to portray the legitimacy of the Swiss process as null and void.

After all, Russian President Vladimir Putin has practically admitted that he is under pressure, as just a few days before the Bürgenstock summit, he tried to divert attention by publicising his own "peace offer," which in reality would cement Russia's previous occupation of Ukrainian territories.

Three directions for the future process

If seen as a series of steps rather than the final reach, the Swiss summit has great potential for success, not just because of the numbers.

The head of Swiss diplomacy, Ignazio Cassis, announced this, saying that his country "would reach out to the Russian authorities," but without saying how he would do this.

His ministry confirmed that this is a process rather than a one-off action, as the weekend meeting "offered the opportunity to discuss for the first time at the highest level how and when Russia can be involved in this process."



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Its greatest potential lies in focusing on three areas whose solution alone will not bring about the war's end. But precisely because of its humanitarian objectives, which will become increasingly difficult to refuse to support, it has a tremendous opportunity to widen the circle of participants.

Given China's sensitivity regarding this issue, the first area, which concerns nuclear safety (the safety of nuclear facilities and the inadmissibility of the use of nuclear weapons), is not only universally acceptable but also strategically calculated to win over China.

As the second point of the final document, global food security, or the uninterrupted manufacturing and supply of food products, aims to win over the dozens of developing economies that have already experienced food supply disruptions due to the conflict in Ukraine.

The third area, which concerns the exchange of prisoners and, in particular, the return home of unlawfully displaced Ukrainian children, will hardly meet with any resistance from the international community due to its clearly humanitarian nature.

If the process continues with the same intensity and enthusiasm, these are points that have great potential to bring together even more participants and, above all, lead to political solutions to the Ukrainian crisis in small steps.