



I.R.C.E.

Institut de Recherche et de Communication sur l'Europe
Le Think et Do Tank des dynamiques européennes

Paris, April 26, 2025

Mr. Volodymyr ZELENSKY
President of the Republic of Ukraine
(by email and letter) (English version)

Mr. President of the Republic,

I am contacting you to share some thoughts and proposals with you, and to ask if I can come and share them with you soon.

As a reminder, the I.R.C.E. is a generalist and independent think and do tank working both for and against European dynamics, including those of the European Union. We readily use strategy, management, and psychology techniques, with extensive social science expertise in negotiation and mediation to structure debates and facilitate and optimize processes, even and especially in diplomacy.

On this day of farewell to Pope Francis, at whose funeral you were present, but also this anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the war in Vietnam, I wanted to reaffirm the admiration we have for you and your people, you who are under fire and have been able to resist and then repel the massive and cruel attacks of the aggression, this time official and undisguised, of your great neighbor in 2022. Even if they are your dead, the populations of the EU, a component of an economic vector of peace, supported by NATO, do not remain insensitive to the suffering endured by the Ukrainians.

This attempted invasion, which served as a reminder of what a real war is, and what wars have been like in Europe, has also erased the causes and origins of war, beyond simply reclaiming territory. Unfortunately, counterattacks have so far failed to push this powerful enemy back beyond your borders. But it is an achievement, both for your forces and your people, who have certainly been supported and structured for 10 years to better resist. This experience must now be put to good use in the territories of the Union, particularly through civil and economic defense.

We got to know you by watching the series *Servant of the People*, which already spoke extensively about the fight against corruption. We became aware of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in 2014 when your former ambassador to France, Oleg Shamshur, advocated for respect for borders and for stopping the daily deaths inside your country, and we welcomed him to the senators' restaurant to discuss it, as we do with his European counterparts. A first draft of a conflict reduction study mission unfortunately failed to come to fruition due to certain warnings raised by your embassy.

For ten years, I have been writing about the crisis and the war in your country, listing the facts and proposing short-, medium-, and long-term solutions, often repeated, such as the military firebreak 100 km from the front, but also about the situations in Crimea and your eastern territories, and we are producing events on this conflict. The feedback from the actions of

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Presidents Sarkozy on Georgia, Hollande, and Chancellor Merkel for the conclusion of the Minsk agreements are a reference, even if we can clearly see that the arrangements are more fragile than viable. It may remain intelligent, always incriminating and exonerating, to still ask the right questions in a spirit of self-preservation. Of course, the Ukrainian people can also reason like other peoples liberated from the Russians and even the United States, but often at what price.

We are also working on generalized aid to your country, including industrial cooperation and reconstruction, which must be financed boldly and transparently, considering, however, that the most destroyed part is occupied by Russia, whose revival we also hope for. Your country is still functioning economically and will undoubtedly always be able to prepare for possible integration into the EU, with its strengths that should be capitalized on and its weaknesses that must be compensated for with aid that can continue, moving from neighborhood to cohesion. Integrating the EU will mean entering into the framework of a certain interdependence that is beneficial for all, especially economically. You will then ensure the exercise of the four fundamental freedoms of the EU.

You are courageous and reckless, and strategy is sometimes better than perseverance. General de Gaulle was able to recreate a French identity even before the United States was forced into the war. Previously, he had helped repel the Russian army in Poland. You succeeded, praised by your predecessor, in creating this resistance and this Ukrainian identity and ensuring that Europeans provided you with more equipment than their allies across the Atlantic, while developing and manufacturing your own equipment, now gradually in cooperation. It is indeed you, through your perseverance, more than D. Trump or V. Putin, who were able to awaken the Europeans, who are certainly closely linked to the United States. This insistence must be measured to retain its full benefit.

NATO has also been able to reactivate itself to fulfill its defensive watch in order to secure the organization's current borders, a sort of geographical but also human red line, thanks to various military presences, without necessarily going as far as installing the proposed firewall and ceasefire. It should also be remembered that its articles two and three on economic cooperation come before its article five on military assistance.

EU member states and other European countries, like the European Union, have also increased their financial efforts to revive their arms production to meet your needs as well as their own in the event of a possible attack on their soil, and to prepare a high-intensity economy, ready to transition to a war economy if they ever are. It is undoubtedly also necessary to better define management locations for optimal spending, in order to deal with the scourge you are experiencing, something that the EU should also modify in its neighborhood management throughout the world. This could allow us to glimpse the beginnings of a constructive future with your country.

It is now necessary to preserve these advances while the front line seems frozen without any major changes in the situation, to analyze proposals, objectives, realities, and to find solutions and options that are measurable, accessible, realistic, achievable, determined in time with acceptable risks for the stability of the center of Europe.

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As you know, when instructing for peace, especially for both the prosecution and the defense, one always runs the risk of being accused of working for the other side. Mediation and negotiation assistance do not involve providing solutions but can nevertheless help to highlight certain facts and realities and allow the parties to talk to each other and move forward in resolving the conflict, except when this cannot be the case, preventing active listening often due to identity issues, or even personalities. It is also sometimes difficult to accept a possible alternative solution and for the win-win principle to be balanced and respected. Every conflict is destructive, even for the one who believes itself to be the strongest. The EU countries and their representatives, particularly in central Europe, are, like you, expecting a total defeat of Russia and a return to the situation before 2014, which seems difficult to achieve today.

Ukraine must be a stakeholder in the negotiations, winning the preserved territories, unlike the imposed Yalta negotiations, and in a constructive manner, otherwise it risks being excluded. We question Europe's place in the negotiations, but aren't the member states and the EU themselves saying that the future of Ukrainians belongs to them? However, if people must be able to determine their own future, can't this decision also concern neighbors or allies, especially when they are asked for help, with or without compensation, unless they are made aware of the risk of the crisis spreading? Doesn't the integration requested into the EU, almost accepted by its executive, or even into NATO, imply a collective dynamic with its members, just as it requires the country to rise up before joining and to value its strengths and weaknesses? Or is it only for a protected area of peace, and by whom ?

Concerning your territories, perhaps it is possible to say that those that are momentarily at risk of being lost, such as the former French Alsace-Moselle, belong and will always belong to Ukraine, while admitting certain contrary provisions, hopefully transitory and temporary, such as when Russia declares that Kyiv is still the mother of Russian cities and that Ukraine is an internal affair, or that Russia takes back the personal gift of Crimea, violating international law? Russia has fortunately not succeeded in invading you and has suffered only external setbacks since 1945. Moreover, one can currently ask why Russia would abandon the territories given that it is not retreating. If the German armies, weakened militarily but especially politically, left France and returned to their country in 1918 in a victorious manner, this is not currently the case for Russia.

As much as Vladimir Putin uses NATO to portray himself as a victim, his desire for demilitarization is not credible, unless we consider Austria's past commitments. Russian leaders could remind us why they are so insistent on these territorial claims. Allowing Russia to retake Ukraine would perhaps constitute a real risk on the EU's borders, not only because of its attitude, but also because it strengthens its potential with now-proven know-how. The Russians are always suspicious. We have the right to be too. But you, who know Russia, perhaps you also have the keys to stopping or making us understand this permanent fear, which unfortunately also exists among the elites of the diaspora established in Europe. The risk is all the greater because even some EU countries have not yet mourned their defeat and their reduction in size and power when the empires disappeared in 1918. We will undoubtedly have to continue to deal with Vladimir Putin in the long term, as we did in the past with Stalin and Bashar El Assad, until the people decide otherwise or the leader evolves. Commenting on his announcements every time is pointless, considering the psychology of the character with his constant and manipulative lies.

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As for President Trump, it seems that his psychology primarily leads him to want things to move forward without being hindered by those blocking the process, and to use games that are often destructive or immediately restorative. Unfortunately, he blows hot and cold while always remaining attentive and potentially willing. But it is also possible to use other psychological games against him. Why would he issue ultimatums if he didn't intend to involve the United States in any case or at least protect its soldiers? The United States came to defend France and Europe twice after a declaration of war and was fully supplied by France in 1918. The production machine that helped Russia in particular really got going in 1942 once the United States felt truly threatened. Everyone agrees, even the Filipinos, who are under attack from China, that the United States, regardless of who their President is, never goes anywhere to ask for anything in return, even if they swear on the Bible, unlike France and the Europeans who might do so.

Europe benefited greatly from the Marshall Plan, but to the benefit of US products. And the same will be true for reconstruction. As we advocate for the "reasoned" Buy European Act by asking the right questions, or for the "Made in Europe" approach with "substantial" European preference without a strict percentage requirement, you can also focus on Europeans, particularly in a desire for integration, without showing your over-dependence on the United States while still sparing them. When de Gaulle did this, Europe was already destroyed, which is not the case today. From now on, in matters of defense, Europeans are meeting at NATO without the United States under Franco-British leadership, and if they use economic sanctions, the only European weapon while waiting for an official defense or an official agreement between the EU and NATO, they represent the credible value of your sovereignty, and you can also contribute to this relearning.

Not joining NATO, even in the long term, does not mean that Ukraine will not be protected if agreements are signed, particularly considering the way you have been able to offset the enemy's push, which will give your allies time to come to your aid this time. It will nevertheless be difficult to join the EU or NATO while at war, even if Cyprus is a counterexample.

France has already experienced temporary cuts to its territories throughout its history. These territories were reconquered through conflicts that were sometimes restorative for some and "carve-up" for others, unlike other countries in Central Europe, such as Hungary or Poland. Freezing borders to stop war, as in Cyprus, where Turkey accuses the EU of having caused the talks to fail, does not mean stopping supporting you, and doing so often involves regular questioning to meet all your demands, whether structural, material, or financial. In 1914, the Serbs accepted all the demands, which did not prevent an expected and desired war. Attempting to freeze the battle line and going back on the Minsk agreements will clearly show who is responsible and who wants peace or war, unless the reason is explained.



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Therefore, I, along with a few members, will be pleased to meet with you whenever possible to discuss and develop these concepts in person as part of this conflict resolution process to better build the future.

Hoping to have retained your attention, please accept, Mr. President of the Republic, the expression of my deepest respect.

François CHARLES Président de l'I.R.C.E.

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