POLICY BRIEF

NINETY DAYS TO NORMAL POLITICS? THE PEACE PROCESS AND ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE

Andrew Wilson

March 2026

There are reports that Ukraine is discussing elections in peace talks involving the United States. These would most likely involve a presidential election and a referendum on any peace deal. But how to organise elections is anything but straightforward.

- How would this work for Ukraine?
- How would it fit with everything Ukraine has to do to manage the war and the war economy, martial law and accession to the European Union?
- Would it be constitutional or constitute proper sequencing when institutions such as parliament, the legal system, local government and the Central Election Commission are arguably just as much in need of a reboot?

Any such elections would require huge political and logistical support.

epik EUROPEAN POLICY INSTITUTE IN KYIV

epik.eu

INTRODUCTION

On 11 February 2026, a well-sourced report in the Financial Times claimed that Ukraine would announce on 24 February, the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion, that it would hold a referendum on a peace deal in May.[1] That did not happen, most likely because there was no peace deal to vote on. But something like this or something similar could happen soon. Even if Ukraine is only negotiating a peace deal through the United States to stay involved in the process, however, some kind of endorsement from the Ukrainian electorate would appear increasingly vital for Kyiv. While the war with Iran might distract Washington's attention from Ukraine in the short term, one possible scenario could be renewed pressure on Ukraine after Easter, coinciding with President Zelensky's desire to share responsibility for any deal and win a second term. The result would be a presidential election and a referendum sometime later this year.

This would be the preference of the Office of the President. An alternative scenario would be more in the direction of a total reboot of the political system. A lengthy to-do list would contain:

- A possible referendum
- New elections, but for what, and in what order?
  - President
  - Parliament
  - Local
- Joining the EU by 2027, even if only "membership-lite"
- Rebooting judicial reform, as key to much or even all of the above
- While respecting the constitution as far as possible

A peace deal might be comprehensive, partial or preliminary. It could be passed/endorsed in a window of opportunity, perhaps a de facto pause in – or suspension of – martial law, in which case what Ukraine could realistically achieve from the to-do list would be highly selective.

If a peace deal remains elusive, restoring normal domestic politics would have to wait. In addition, a peace deal could fail to provide enough in terms of security guarantees, or push them too far into the future, to justify going ahead.

How would these various scenarios pan out? Would what works or does not work affect what Ukraine might or might not agree to in the peace negotiations? There is talk of unfreezing politics.[2] If, as seems most likely, not everything is unfrozen at once, however, would that make things easier or create new dysfunctionalities?

Ukraine seems to be locked into Washington's push for early elections. Is this the right way forward? Would it be a good idea to in effect have two parts of a peace deal: one before and one after elections? If so, what would come first?

A PAUSE OR A DEFREEZE?

The constitution and past practice provide for lengthy preparations for elections. However, the only way to a peace deal might be to concede a referendum and then work backwards. According to Andrii Mahera, former deputy head of the Central Election Commission, it would not be possible to pause martial law for elections and then bring it back: "The Constitution does not provide for this. It only provides for the introduction of the legal regime of martial law, and then its abolition. It is not possible to prescribe a new norm in the law on martial law if such a norm is not provided for by the Constitution".[3]

Similarly, there are only two types of elections: normal and pre-term. There is nothing in the constitution about special circumstances or "post-war" elections. The constitution and election law are not friendly to simultaneous voting. Enabling legislation will therefore be key. This is the work of parliament, even though parliamentary elections might not be scheduled or planned.

1. Christopher Miller, *"Zelensky planning elections in Ukraine and vote on peace deal"*, The Financial Times, 11 February 2026.

2. Anatolii Oktysiuk and Balázs Jarábik, *"Unfreezing Politics: Ukraine's Internal Battlefield"* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace , 23 October 2025.

3. Nataliya Lebid', "Andrii Mahera: *«Konstytutsiya dozvolyaye referendum z pytannya terytorii, ale idet'sya pro ii zbil'shennya, a ne zmenshennya»*", Tyzhden' , 10 March 2026/

LOCOMOTIVE PLANS

This is one reason for the "locomotive" idea – to link things and to pull the timetable along. The Office of the President is in the driving seat, and its preference seems to be to couple a referendum with a new presidential election. This builds on earlier hints at a presidential election after Zelensky's original five-year term expired in May 2024. An official parliamentary working group under Verkhovna Rada Deputy Chair Oleksandr Korniyenko was set up to work on legal facilitation and preparation in December 2025.

The aim of this plan is threefold. First to share responsibility for any peace deal by putting it to a public vote. Because the Americans are not pushing for one, Zelensky would be left exposed without a referendum. But not by asking about the details. Polling by the Kyiv International Institute for Sociology (KIIS) in late January 2026 showed that 52 percent of Ukrainians considered a deal that traded territorial concessions for security guarantees from the United States "absolutely unacceptable".[4] In addition, the Ukrainian Constitution states that the country's territorial integrity is inviolable. The normal interpretation of this is that a referendum on giving up territory would be unconstitutional. Much more likely therefore would be a general question along the lines of: "Do you support the peace deal and the ending of the war?" KIIS polling in January showed that if asked whether they agreed with a referendum in general, 55 percent said yes.[5] However, support had fallen a little, to 50%, by March.[6] Voters are less likely to miss an opportunity to end the fighting, even if they do not like the details of any deal.

In late January 2026 showed that 52 percent of Ukrainians considered a deal that traded territorial concessions for security guarantees from the United States "absolutely unacceptable".

A second aim would be to mobilise voters and increase turnout in a parallel presidential election. Here, the Office of the President is possibly looking at the example of Moldova in 2024, when incumbent President Maia Sandu won re-election by linking the presidential vote to a referendum on making Moldova's EU membership aspirations constitutional. Turnout was up by 6 percent and Sandu won 55 percent of the vote, with the support of 83 percent of Moldovans voting from abroad – nearly all based in the EU. On the other hand, she politicised the Europe issue, which only just passed in the referendum with 50.4 percent support. The lesson for Ukraine is that using political technology tactics to manipulate elections can work, but can also backfire.

A third aim would be to win. Zelensky's prospects for re-election might have diminished by 2027. According to political analyst Anatolii Oktysiuk, the Office of the President might prefer "to partly unfreeze politics and political competition, but in controlled mode". It might also prefer "elections in [still] restricted conditions – restricted for the Present's rivals, mass media, his opponents".[7] The Office of the President already has a comparative advantage in key areas. It controls what used to be oligarchic TV and is now mainly part of the United News Telemarathon.[8] It also has a network of friendly social media channels, especially on Telegram. It is adept at Ukraine's most characteristic political technology,[9] which is "grechka", meaning "buckwheat" – or free gifts or cash to influence voters. There are many reasons why the state has issued 1000 Hryvnias

4. The specific proposal was: *"Ukraine withdraws its troops from the territories of Donbas that it currently controls, i.e. from Kramatorsk, Sloviansk, etc., and these territories pass under Russian control. In return, the USA and Europe give Ukraine security guarantees"*. 'Public opinion in the context of Russia's attempts to plunge Ukraine into darkness and cold: results of a survey conducted on January 23-29, 2026', KIIS , 2 February 2026.

5. 'War and peace: opinions and views of Ukrainians (results of a survey conducted on January 9-14, 2026)', *KIIS*, 16 January 2026.

6. 'Spryynyattya mozhlyvoho referendum shchodo myrnoï uhody: resul'taty opytuvannya, provedenoho 1-8 bereznya 2026 roku,' *KIIS*, 16 March 2026.

7. Interview, 16 March 2026.

8. The collective TV broadcasting system introduced in 2022, to which most popular TV channels now belong.

9. See Andrew Wilson's blog at https://www.politicaltechnology.blog/.

payments in winter support and 1500 Hryvnias payments to the vulnerable, including Ukraine's 10 million pensioners, but grechka is one of them. Third, the Office of the President is "pressing" on opponents, using media outlets, legal institutions and administrative resources to cut them down to size. The Office of the President will be most wary of any candidate who can mobilise protest votes.

Martial law might only be lifted at the last minute. Sensibly enough, the Office of the President would wait to do so until the phase in the peace process when security guarantees have become concrete. Elections-lite could involve "government-controlled television, tight campaign deadlines, curfews, closed borders". In the words of Dzerkalo tyzhnya, this would be "not a violation of the law as such, but rather the formation of a specific electoral architecture, maximally adapted to the conditions of martial law and a short campaign".[10]

There are an estimated 3.7 million IDPs, 5 to 7.5 million Ukrainians living abroad (the UNHCR says 5.9 million), and 1.4 million who do not have a voting address.

PREREQUISITES

One reason for holding a presidential election/referendum in tandem is that it would be somewhat easier to organise. Many factors regulating presidential elections are matters of law, not the constitution. One interpretation is that the campaign for such an election could begin a month after the end of martial law, while a six-month interval would be needed for parliamentary elections.[11] A long preparation period would not suit any 2026 timeframe. It certainly would not suit the US administration, which will be engaged in mid-term elections by the summer, with plans to manipulate them.

In Ukraine, it is easier to trigger a presidential election, perhaps by the president's resignation. The Office of the President might also calculate that it would be easier not to unfreeze all the other institutions.

Nonetheless, any elections would still require considerable time and preparation. Parliament currently has seven working groups considering how to run a one-off election while war is only suspended at best. Each are cross-party, with civil society and Central Election Commission representatives. The seven groups are examining election infrastructure, security of voting, how the armed forces might vote, how internally displaced persons (IDPs) might vote, how Ukrainians abroad might vote and information support.

The Central Election Commission's State Register of Voters resumed operations in December 2025 but election infrastructure has not been updated since the last elections. Only 75 percent of polling stations are operational. There are an estimated 3.7 million IDPs,[12] 5 to 7.5 million Ukrainians living abroad (the UNHCR says 5.9 million),[13] and 1.4 million who do not have a voting address.[14] The number of disabled people has increased by 600,000, to 3.4 million. New polling stations must be set up and new voting district boundaries drawn.

Who would get to vote? There are sensitive issues around defining collaboration, and the rights of politicians who once represented the pro-Russian parties that were banned in 2022. There are moral issues about voting rights in or near the Temporarily Occupied Territories, especially if a referendum de facto concerns the fate of those territories. Those in Temporarily Occupied Territories are of course hard to reach, but the right to vote could be established online or in third-party countries. Those in government-controlled areas will need particular administrative support. Given the damage to information infrastructure, printed media will be important for vulnerable groups. "Flexible voter registration, including digital tools", would help

10. Inna Vedernikova, *'Za sklom: perehovory bez finalu, vybory bez myru'*, Dzerkalo tyzhnya , 12 February 2026.

11. Maryna Shashkova, *'Povoyenni vybory v Ukraïni: pidhotovka ta klyuchovi pytannya'*, Ukrinform , 6 February 2026.

12. *'Crisis in Ukraine'*, IOM UN Migration , 14 March 2025.

13. *'After a brutal winter, millions of Ukrainians face deepening displacement and uncertainty'*, UNHCR , 2026.

14. Olena Mazun, *'33 million people are on the voter list, but not all will be able to vote: CEC explains the reason'*, Liga.net , 22 December 2025.

to deal with "displacement and documentation gaps" while "Mobile polling stations, longer voting periods could ensure access in sparsely populated frontline-adjacent areas".[15]

IDPs are disproportionally from or near the Temporarily Occupied Territories. There are moral, practical and strategic issues about Ukrainians voting from abroad. Some may be there illegally. Recent elections in the neighbouring states of Moldova, Georgia and Romania have shown that who votes can be hugely important to the end result. Moldovans in the EU, for example, were much more pro-EU. However, many countries require that voting in foreign elections can only be done at embassies or consulates. In Poland, there are an estimated 906,000 Ukrainian voters, but only five polling stations, which makes voting logistically impossible.[16]

Voting rights for the armed forces will also be hugely important, especially for the estimated 300,000 fighting on the front line. Special voting stations might be a physical target for Russia. Postal or online voting might also be a hybrid war and disinformation target, along with voting from abroad. Polling by KIIS in January 2026 showed that 60 percent had a negative attitude to online voting, rising to 71 percent if the possibility of fraud was mentioned.[17] ID could be used instead of passports. Members of the armed forces would need to have the right to stand and campaign, even if they are on active service.

There will also have to be a decision on whether to keep the current 50 percent turnout threshold for a referendum to be valid. The case for removing it is that it will be difficult to hit and many voters are hard to reach – and Ukraine does not want to make it easier by not working as hard as it should to register as many people as possible. However, the case for keeping the threshold, to minimise arguments about who voted, is probably stronger.

A legal basis for elections must also be created. This would be parliament's work, and would take an estimated two months. The Constitutional Court would need to approve the process, either in advance or after – risking the possibility of the whole process being annulled. The issue of who votes is not just a technicality. Nor is the suspension of martial law just a technicality. Elections need to be held in free and fair conditions, with full civil rights to demonstrate and to participate, and with free and fair information. The result of an election or referendum could be struck down if these conditions are not met.

The most likely route to calling a referendum is by "popular initiative", which requires 3 million signatures from voters in 60 percent of the 27regions. Collecting these would require peace just as much as the campaign and voting. It could be in this fine detail, if shortcuts are taken, that a legal challenge would be most likely. In addition, there can only be one successful popular initiative, as rival referendums would be chaotic.

DANGERS

There are huge dangers even with just a presidential election and/or referendum. One is that things are done in a rush, leaving vulnerability to subsequent constitutional review – particularly if civil society advice to take more time and care is ignored. Another danger is a close or controversial result, particularly if one group of voters – IDPs, Ukrainians abroad, those in the armed forces, one region or regions – finds it harder to vote than others. Another danger is the revival of hostile influences. Russia will seek to rebuild influence and/or discredit the process. US and US-based media platforms might interfere online. A local version of Newsmax was due to launch in the spring of 2026. "Peace" candidates supporting a US-brokered deal, and backed by both the United States and Russia, cannot be ruled out. Ukraine's oligarchs have lost considerable influence since 2022 and will try to build it back. Given the move online and the declining audience for the United News Telemarathon, Ukraine has scope for plenty of new media. Not all will be benign. Some could be "joint ventures" with covert Russian or US support. Vested interests, or even outside forces, could try to recapture an as yet only partially reformed judiciary.

15. Email from Lesia Bidockhko, 20 March 2026.

16. Kateryna Hanzha, *'U Pol'shchi perebuvayut' blyz'ko 906 tys. ukraïns'kykh vybortsiv – vitsespikera VR Kondratyuk'*, Espreso , 11 March 2026.

17. *'Viyna i myr: dumky i pohlyady ukraïnstiv (rezul'taty opytuvannya, provedenoho 9-14 sichnya 2026 roku'*, KIIS , 16 January 2026.

If Zelensky looks likely to win a second term, Russia could sabotage the peace process. If a challenger exploits dissatisfaction with the peace process, Russia might have another reason to sabotage the process. The Office of the President is trying to control the protest potential that has accumulated since 2022. Polls show that 69 percent are prepared to protest, rising to 82 percent for those aged 18 to 24.[18] A febrile election involving foreign interference could detonate protest. Any sign of treating big groups of voters differently – at home, abroad, displaced in the armed services – could trigger protest.

A referendum on an imperfect peace deal would not be an end point. There is a danger of too much politics, or putting internal politics before a sustainable peace.

Another danger is further recentralisation of power around the Office of the President. Victory in a referendum and elections would obviously strengthen Zelensky, but a presidential election is also personal and candidate-based. New political parties are more likely to emerge from parliamentary elections. New presidential elections would also obviously strengthen the presidency as an institution and leave other institutions looking tired and feeling weakened. A referendum on the peace process would increase the trend for securitisation that was strengthening the presidency even before the full-scale invasion, with a shift of functions to the National Security and Defence Council in 2021 as Ukraine prepared for war.

A referendum on the peace process would increase the trend for securitisation that was strengthening the presidency even before the full-scale invasion.

TIRED INSTITUTIONS

Of all the Ukrainian institutions, parliament looks most in need of a reboot. As Vox Ukraine reports, "by the end of 2025, the pace of reforms included in the Ukraine Facility had slowed significantly.[19] Failure to implement 11 measures in the fourth quarter of 2025 increased the year's overall shortfall to 15 indicators – 27% of the annual target".[20] In the first two months of 2026, "Parliament did not adopt a single law envisaged by the Ukraine Facility". Parliament also risked Ukraine's continued IMF funding because of its failure to act on tax.[21]

As of March 2026, there were only 393 parliamentarians left out of 450. Back in 2019, 26 seats were originally vacant because of empty seats in Crimea and the occupied Donbas; another 31 MPs have gone since. Half-plus-one, or 226 votes, are still needed for a majority, which has essentially disappeared. There is a stand-off: parliament does not pass many presidential initiatives while the Office of the President tries to exert more informal control over the deputies, using sticks and carrots, and favours.

All political parties look tired and hardly any will stand at the next election. They were first elected in 2019, which is a long time ago. The Opposition Platform, For Life, a pro-Russia party masquerading as pro-peace, has been banned. Holos (Voice) has split. The European Platform of former President Petro Poroshenko might survive as it has its niche. Pro-European parties are weaker than for a long time. Former Prime Minister Yuliia Tymoshenko's Fatherland party has been hit by corruption investigations (allegedly trying to buy the balance of power in parliament). So-called independent factions are really the tools of oligarchs. Nobody expects Zelensky's Servant of the People party to survive. Pro-presidential parties are likely to be relaunched across the political spectrum: a technocratic party based on Diya (as a metaphor, Diya is the app for state services); a "party of war" under Zelensky's chief of staff and former head of the Main Intelligence Directorate (HUR) Kyrylo

18. *'Pidtrymka protestiv'*, Gradus , 2025.

19. Vitalii Bulba, Olena Burul and Ivan Melnychuk, *'How the Verkhovna Rada Is Slowing Ukraine's EU Integration'*, Vox Ukraine , 13 March 2026.

20. *'Ukraine Facility'*, Ukraine Facility , 2026.

21. Olna Gulayeva, *'Ukraine may lose IMF funding due to delays in Rada's decisions on tax hikes, - Bloomberg'*, Censor.net , 17 March 2026.

Budanov and former battalion commander Andrii Biletsky; a civic-volunteer party; and something for voters in eastern and southern Ukraine. There will be more artifice here than was likely before the summer of 2025, when corruption scandals and attacks on the anti-corruption agencies did lasting damage to Zelensky's popularity.

This means that the current parties in parliament do not really speak for anybody. Opinion polls show a desire for new faces: from volunteer movements, from the military, from civil society. Current parties are even more unpopular than parliament. As of December 2025, KIIS had its trust rating at 12%.[22]

The deputies themselves are tired. There are rumours that many want to quit.[23] Many now vote consequentially, not wanting to take responsibility for controversial decisions.

Other political and legal institutions also need a reboot. Local government has lost the benefits of the much-vaunted decentralisation reforms. Thousands of administrative units were reduced and reformed, amalgamated and empowered as communities (Hromady) in 2015–20, giving real voice and agency to localities. Now martial law and military administration predominate.

The Central Election Commission was elected in October 2019 for a seven-year term, so is also at the end of its mandate, although that mandate lasts as long as martial law.

The Congress of Judges convened for three days in March 2026 after a 19-month gap. It made some progress in electing members to the Council of Judges and two new members of the High Council of Justice, but it failed to elect new members to the Constitutional Court. There was little sense of urgency in its work.

One reason why anti-corruption institutions are now significant political players is that they have filled some of the gaps left by the above institutions. Civil society, however, has suffered from the withdrawal of USAID funding, from the involvement of key individuals in the war effort and from a certain sense that it is privileged.

REBOOTING JUDICIAL REFORM

The Constitutional Court of Ukraine (CCU) is intimately involved in all of the above issues. The CCU must approve elections and referendums, either before or after. It must approve enabling law that allows them to take place and confirm that they took place properly. It must approve the approval of international treaties. Its proper functioning is a key part of EU conditionality.[24] However, the Constitutional Court is not working properly.

The CCU has 18 members: six chosen by the president, six by parliament and six by the Congress of Judges. It fell inquorate with only 11 members in January 2025. The president appointed two replacements in June and September 2025. Parliament failed to appoint two more in October 2025. The Congress of Judges failed to appoint two in March 2026. So there are currently only 13 out of 18 judges. One of the missing judges is on the president's quota, two are for parliament to appoint and two are on the Congress of Judges' quota.

A new procedure for making appointments was agreed in 2023, which was one of the requirements of the European Commission for the start of Ukraine's accession negotiations to the EU. After the Constitutional Court crisis in 2020–22, when the Court struck down reform and anti-corruption measures and was allegedly influenced by pro-Russian forces, an Advisory Group of Experts was set up to approve appointments. Half of its six members are representatives of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe (Europe's legal watchdog) and half are domestic Ukrainian experts. Three judges have been appointed under this system, so it is not impossible. If in the past there was compromise among different political factions when appointing judges, however, factions can no longer steer their choices through the system. There is therefore a reluctance to appoint to the Court.[25] In addition, a lot of Ukraine's previously corrupt judiciary will not get past the Advisory Group of Experts.

22. *'Trust in Public Institutions'*, KIIS , 13 January 2026.

23. Sergii Kostezh, *'Mutiny Brewing in Ukraine's Legislature?'*, Kyiv Post , 17 March 2026.

24. Sergiy Sydorenko, *'Full EU benchmarks for Ukraine: what Kyiv must do to join'*, European Pravda , 23 February 2026.

25. Svitlana Dorosh, *'Kryza u Konstytutsiynomu sudi. Khto i chomu paralizuye yoho robotu'*, BBC News Ukraine , 9 October 2025.

This means that the Constitutional Court can barely do its job. To make a full decision at what is called Grand Chamber level requires 10 votes, but obtaining 10 of the current 13 votes is extremely difficult.

Since the full-scale invasion, the Constitutional Court has made 41 decisions. So it is operating. However, three-quarters of its decisions were to declare something unconstitutional.[26] So when it is active, it is often negative.

A BIG REBOOT

What are new elections or referendums actually for? Are they to manage the peace process with the United States? To legitimise any peace deal? To revive political institutions? Are they to renationalise politics, or to repopulate the political space with new political parties, NGOs and political movements? For the latter two, other elections are just as important. It is also important to stick to constitutional functions: the president signs international treaties; parliament ratifies them.

Willingness to fight on "as long as it takes" has increased over the winter, from a low point of 54 percent to 65 percent.

Arguably, parliamentary elections should come first to make all the necessary legal changes in a refreshed legislature, and to minimise problems of changing the rules of the game under martial law. There is a strong legal and constitutional case that the normal route to presidential elections is for parliament to schedule them. In which case, new parliamentary elections would be appropriate to produce a more legitimate parliament. The current parliament is too vulnerable to external influence, particularly from the Office of the President.

Parliament has to adopt laws on new elections. Again, this should be a new parliament. According to political analyst Petro Burkovsky, "the current parliament", elected in 2019, "does not reflect the current political and social situation in the country".[27] Finally, if the president resigns, as seems possible, his powers would be exercised by the Speaker of Parliament. Again, there is a case for that being a new Speaker with a fresher mandate.

Holding presidential elections on their own or with a referendum risks unbalancing the political system when there has already been considerable securitisation and centralisation of power around the Office of the President.

ENLARGEMENT-LITE

Ukraine's EU membership in 2027 is an ambitious target. Even "reverse accession" or "reverse enlargement" (implementation of key reforms after rather than before joining) or "enlargement-lite" would involve plenty of conditionality. Thus far, enlargement-lite is just a slogan. Because no accession date has yet been set, there is no set timetable. EU conditionality in the six negotiating clusters was revealed in February and March 2026, and still involves plenty of substantial legislation, with a focus on the rule of law, anti-corruption and human rights – all of which will need EU approval.[28] Moreover, if full adoption of the acquis communautaire is pushed into the future, then the proper functioning of existing political institutions will be even more important. Parliament, not the presidency, will have to implement the necessary legislation. The courts, not the presidency, are already at the centre of EU conditionality on the rule of law.

WORKING BACKWARDS: POLICY POINTS

The countries supporting Ukraine should be aware of the stresses caused by the US push for elections and by its timetable preferences. Even

26. Svitlana Matviienko, *'Not by Quorum Alone: What the Constitutional Court Still Lacks for Effective Work'*, Laboratory of Legislative Initiatives , 3 July 2025. From Ukraïns'ka pravda.

27. Interview with Petro Burkovsky, 18 March 2026.

28. Sergiy Sydorenko, *'Full EU benchmarks for Ukraine: what Kyiv must do to join'*, European Pravda , 23 February 2026.

putting elections first is a problem. Ukraine does not have a legitimacy problem. That is a bogus Russian propaganda argument.

It is worth making the point more loudly that it is in fact Russia that has a legitimacy problem. Russia has not had a genuine election since the 1990s. Russian "elections" since 2014 have also broken international law by counting votes from the Temporarily Occupied Territories.

Ukraine should not be pressed into holding elections because Russia says so. It should certainly not be forced to hold elections prematurely, even before the substantive parts of any peace agreement have been agreed.

If there are elections, Ukraine will need enormous logistical help with all the types of voting described above. Security concerns will not be suspended. Ukraine will have particular security needs to secure safe voting, both physically and possibly online. Deputy Speaker of Parliament Oleksandr Koniyenko has estimated election costs at 6 billion Hryvnias or $140 million.[29] Host countries will of course be able to help with Ukrainians voting from abroad.

Either within the process itself or as an adjunct to it, there should be greater voice for representatives of other branches of the state, beyond the Office of the President and the National Security Council. This should build on the presence of Davyd Arakhamiia, head of the Servant of the People faction in parliament, who was sensibly appointed to the peace process to show what is politically possible and what is not – and what might have unintended consequences.

With EU conditionality, more emphasis on completing judicial reform serves both the accession process and a potential election process – and is a good thing in itself.

Public opinion should also count for more in the peace process. There are many signs of war weariness but KIIS polling in January 2026 found no predominant reason why people are fed up with war. "People are dying" is the top concern, at 29 percent. Shooting and destruction, and air raids are cited by 17 percent and economic problems by 17 percent, while 15 percent cite "problems with electricity, heat and water". So Russia's winter blackout campaign has not worked. On the other hand, willingness to fight on "as long as it takes" has increased over the winter, from a low point of 54 percent to 65 percent. Kyiv, which has often recently been hit hard by Russian attacks, is above average at 72 percent . A healthy 77 percent believe in Ukraine's "effective resistance".[30]

Effectively, this means that Ukraine does not have to rush towards early elections. It is more important to get the process right and support, rather than undermine, everything else that Ukraine is trying to do.

29. *'Post-war elections will cost $140 million to hold'*, New Voice of Ukraine , 5 February 2026.

30. *'Public opinion in the context of Russia's attempts to plunge Ukraine into darkness and cold: results of a survey conducted on January 23-29, 2026'*, KIIS , 2 February 2026.

Andrew Wilson

Professor of Ukrainian Studies at
University College London,
a Visiting Policy Fellow at EPIK
in February 2026

The European Policy Institute in Kyiv (EPIK) is a newly established think tank with a mission to inform policymaking by providing rigorous analysis, strategic insight, and forward-leaning policy ideas that contribute to Ukraine's European integration and regional security.

EPIK aims to be an independent, trusted, and influential voice in both Ukraine and the EU — a go-to platform for policymakers, experts, and international partners seeking clarity in complex policy environments.

EPIK was established by the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI) through its Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS). It is co-funded by the European Union and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or the Government of Sweden.

Cover photo: Sergei Chuzavkov

epik EUROPEAN POLICY INSTITUTE IN KYIV