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Zelenskiy Lowers Conscription Age, Says Kyiv Doesn't Need To Mobilize 500,000 Troops

By [RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service](#)

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said he did not think Ukraine needs to mobilize as many as 500,000 more people into the military -- an idea he floated late last year -- but said he did not know yet how many are needed.

Speaking on April 3 in Kyiv at a joint news conference with Finnish President Alexander Stubb, Zelenskiy [said](#) he was grateful to the Central Committee for its detailed report on the defense of Ukraine, saying it was important that it "found strength within the armed forces."

Zelenskiy said the report, which had been requested by commander in chief Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskiy, determined that the 500,000 figure was wrong, partly because existing troops could be sent from the rear to the front.

Zelenskiy on April 2 signed a bill lowering the mobilization age from 27 to 25 in an indication of its need for new conscripts, more than two years after Russia launched its full-scale invasion.

Zelensky said during the briefing with Stubb that Russia is preparing to mobilize an additional 300,000 troops on June 1. But Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, quoted by Russian news agencies, said the Ukrainian president's assertion was untrue.

Zelenskiy [spoke again](#) in his evening video address about Moscow's intentions regarding mobilization.

"We clearly understand what they are preparing for in Russia, what they want, what they will recruit soldiers for...and we, all of us, our partners, must have a strong response to Russian operations -- any Russian operations," Zelenskiy said.

Russia is increasing the size of its army in two ways -- through the conscription of citizens aged 18 to 30 in a campaign that began on April 1 and through the signing of contracts with the Defense Ministry.

The Russian authorities also have increased the financial incentives for those who sign a contract. The authorities in one southern Russian region on April 3 decided to increase the one-time payment to 1 million rubles (\$10,800), a new high.

In a statement, the Russian Defense Ministry said more than 100,000 people have signed contracts since the start of the year, including about 16,000 since the deadly attack on the Crocus City Hall entertainment venue on March 22 in which more than 140 people died.

The attack was claimed by the Islamic State extremist group, but Russian President Vladimir Putin and other top Russian officials have accused Ukraine of being involved. Kyiv and its Western backers have denied the accusation.

During the joint news conference, Stubb said Finland would send 188 million euros (\$203 million) in additional military aid, including air defenses and ammunition. That sum took Finland's overall defense contribution to Ukraine to around 2 billion euros since the start of the war.

"We are not giving this military support only for Ukraine to defend itself, we are giving this military support for Ukraine to win this war," Stubb said.

Stubb also signed a 10-year security deal with Ukraine, making Finland the eighth NATO member this year to commit to long-term security cooperation and defense backing for Kyiv.

In his nightly address, Zelenskiy said Ukraine is "gradually planning" its collaboration with partners for the coming months, saying May and June "should become a time of activity for the sake of Ukraine, for the sake of achieving our goals in this war."

With reporting by Reuters

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