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Hopes for a peace deal center on negotiators at a palace in Istanbul.

March 29, 2022, 2:42 p.m. ET
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President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey speaking on Tuesday before talks between Ukrainian and Russian negotiators in Istanbul, in a photo provided by the Turkish presidential press service. Murat Cetin Muhurdar/Turkish Presidential Press Service, via AFP - Getty Images

ISTANBUL — On Tuesday, for the first time in more than two weeks, Ukrainian and Russian negotiators came face to face. They did so over a white tablecloth at a long table inside a 19th-century Ottoman palace on the banks of the Bosphorus, welcomed personally by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who greeted them in English with “good morning.”

After more than a month of talks — first in person in Belarus, then in recent weeks by video link — the diplomacy between Ukraine and Russia [running in parallel to their war](#) entered a new phase on Tuesday. The fact that the negotiations had become more serious was reflected in the setting, the palace where Mr. Erdogan — who has maintained ties with both Moscow and Kyiv — often holds major government events when in Istanbul.

“As the members of the delegations, you have shouldered a historic responsibility,” Mr. Erdogan told the delegates, addressing them from a podium before an artwork showing birds drifting over Istanbul landmarks. “All the world is expecting good news from you.”

David Arakhamia, the head of the nine-person Ukrainian delegation, said that holding the talks in Turkey was a “victory” in itself, because Turkey “is our friend and partner.” The earlier in-person rounds of talks had been held in Belarus, Russia’s closest ally.

But Turkey, while a NATO member, has also been determined to maintain ties with Russia, refusing to join sanctions against Moscow and maintaining direct air connections to multiple Russian cities. Mr. Erdogan said that once President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia and President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine were ready to meet in person, Turkey would be ready to host them.

In video footage of the meeting distributed by Turkey, the two delegations could not be seen shaking hands, with the Russians arriving after the Ukrainians were already seated. But they made small talk in Russian, as when Mr. Arakhamia told the head of the Russian delegation, Vladimir Medinsky, that the little bottle on the table was hand sanitizer; Mr. Medinsky’s response was not fully audible, but some Russian media said he [quipped](#), “Vodka, I thought.”

The Russian delegates wore suits, while the Ukrainians were dressed more casually, one in a short-sleeve shirt, another in military fatigues.

The delegates gathered on the grounds of the Dolmabahce Palace in central Istanbul. It was where Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, died in 1938, and it is now used in part by Mr. Erdogan as one of his offices when he is in Istanbul.

Also in the room as Mr. Erdogan spoke was Roman Abramovich, the Russian business tycoon who is reported to have shuttled between Moscow and Kyiv to try to push the talks forward. Reports have emerged that he and several Ukrainian negotiators had been victims of a potential poisoning after suffering symptoms including impaired vision at previous rounds of talks. Mr. Abramovich sat next to Ibrahim Kalin, Mr. Erdogan’s spokesman.

Safak Timur contributed reporting.

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