**In Burgenstock, leaders seek a peace framework for Ukraine, without Russia**

A 20 minutes drive from Lucerne, a key city in central Switzerland buzzing with tourists, is a heavenly resort nestled in the Alps and overlooking lake Luzern from high above. This largest integrated modern hotel resort in the country, rebuilt in 2014, has its roots dating back to the 18th century. It has played hosts to celebrities and world leaders. Jawaharlal Nehru and Jimmy Carter holidayed here; Audrey Hepburn tied the knot in a chapel here. The resort, at times, has played peacemaker, too.

These past few days residents here have been subjected to the constant whirring of helicopters as the lake resort gears up to welcome world leaders for the Summit on Peace in Ukraine on June 15-16.

A fractious meeting

Barbed wire, steel fencing, aerial reconnaissance, surveillance on the lake and some 4,000 troops deployed to seal off Burgenstock as it prepares to welcome dozens of world leaders, including Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European heads of governments and states who will fly in from the G-7 summit in Italy.

Of the 160 invitations sent out, some 90 countries and international organisations have confirmed their attendance, including several heads of states and governments. The conference aims to inspire a ‘future peace process’ framework.

But the most notable absentee on the table raises doubts about what it can achieve. President Vladimir Putin of Russia has not been invited to the summit that will talk about the Russia-Ukraine war. Conspicuous in his absence will be U.S. President Joe Biden, who will be represented by Vice-President Kamala Harris and NSA Jake Sullivan. China has chosen to stay away. And so has Brazil, the current chair of G-20.

“This is like having an engagement party without one of the party getting engaged or a wedding without the bridegroom. Without the equal participation of Russia, this is not an initiative which can be sustained,” says retired diplomat Asoke Mukerji, who served as India’s Permanent Representative to the UN in New York.

Swiss Mediation

Language is not the only barrier to start conversations on the war and political turmoil in Europe with residents of Lucerne or strangers in coffee shops. The Swiss do not talk politics easily. An Irish woman who runs a coffee-cum-book store made Switzerland her home more than three decades ago. She says the Swiss believe in ‘neutrality’. “They (Swiss) are interested in politics and are keenly watching the summit. But they will not talk in the open and rather keep their political opinions to themselves since this is a neutral country.”

Neutrality is a key principle of Switzerland’s foreign policy that refrains it from engaging or picking sides in a war. However, it promises to open up space for dialogue. “It is a generating source of peace and stability in Europe and beyond. It ensures the country’s independence and the inviolability of its territory. According to the law of neutrality, Switzerland must not participate in a war between states,” reads the charter.

Swiss diplomats have facilitated standalone peace negotiations as well as through international organisations such as the UN and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in some 20 countries in recent years.

But Russia has said the Swiss are no longer neutral as they applied the ban on purchase and import of Russian diamonds as part of the 12th EU sanctions agreed to in the December 2023 G-7 summit, despite Switzerland not being a member of the bloc.

The Burgenstock conference raises questions over Swiss neutrality with the omission of Mr. Putin from the talks which will see Mr. Zelenskyy in attendance.

India’s messaging

The absence of its important strategic defence partner Russia in the room is also seen as the reason India has shied away from a high-level political representation despite Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba extending the invite to the top leadership during his New Delhi visit earlier in the year. Just last week, a day after Mr. Putin spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi following NDA’s election victory, Mr. Zelenskyy, too, dialled the PM. “We discussed the upcoming Global Peace Summit. We rely on India’s participation at the highest level. I also invited Prime Minister Modi to visit Ukraine at a convenient time,” he later wrote on X.

New Delhi has chosen instead to send Pavan Kapoor, India’s senior diplomat and Secretary West in the Ministry of External Affairs to the Swiss-led conference.

Switzerland is currently a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the first time since joining the UN in 2002 and wants to use its office for further engagement in peace policy. But the conference is likely to raise raise uncomfortable questions. “The Conference will have to take a position on why the only UN Security Council endorsed peace framework for Ukraine, which are the Minsk Agreements, are not being implemented,” Mr. Mukerji wrote in a recent article.