



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on October 23, 2023

NATO Officials Have “Emergency Meeting” After Putin-Orbán Meeting in China

On October 19, the U.S. state-controlled media outlet Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reported that the ambassadors to Hungary from NATO countries have conducted unscheduled talks amid worries about a recent meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in China.

Putin and Orbán met on October 17 in Beijing, on the fringes of China’s Belt and Road Forum. It was the first meeting between the Russian leader and the Hungarian prime minister since the Russo-Ukrainian conflict intensified in February 2022.



AP Images
Viktor Orbán and Vladimir Putin

Subsequently, the meeting of NATO officials and an envoy from Sweden, whose NATO membership has yet to be ratified by Türkiye and Hungary, occurred in Budapest on October 19.

At the October 19 meeting, NATO diplomats discussed “security concerns” about the “deepening relations” between Moscow and Hungary, according to David Pressman, the U.S. ambassador to Hungary, in statements to RFE/RL.

Moreover, Pressman pointed out that Washington expects the Hungarian government to take these “legitimate security concerns” seriously, decrying the Putin-Orbán meeting as “worrying.”

On the day of the Putin-Orbán meeting in Beijing, Pressman posted a picture on X of Orbán and Putin exchanging handshakes, with the caption that Hungary’s prime minister was opting to align with Russia “alone among our allies.”

In turn, Orbán’s chief of staff, Gergely Gulyás, told ATV channel on October 18 that “the US ambassador is not competent to determine Hungarian foreign policy because that is the job of the Hungarian government.”

During his meeting with Orbán, Putin said that chances for bilateral talks were “quite limited” under present “geopolitical circumstances,” noting that Hungary and Russia have been keeping good bilateral ties notwithstanding Russia’s conflict with Ukraine.

“A chance to exchange opinions with Hungary, an EU member, not only on bilateral issues but also on the situation in the world and in Europe is important,” the Russian leader elaborated.

Putin highlighted that both countries differed on some topics, thus making bilateral talks all the more important.

For his part, Orbán acknowledged that Western sanctions imposed on Russia have had a deleterious impact on Hungary’s ties with Russia. Furthermore, the Hungarian leader revealed that Budapest was



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actively attempting to save whatever aspects of Russo-Hungarian relations that could be salvaged.

“Hungary never sought confrontation with Russia; on the contrary, Hungary’s goal was to establish and improve the relations,” the Hungarian prime minister said.

In particular, Orbán noted Russian energy supplies and work on a nuclear power plant in Hungary as examples of mutually beneficial ties, which have carried on despite the Russian-Western fallout.

Orbán has been a vocal opponent of the EU’s approach to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, which the alliance has labeled an “unprovoked Russian aggression.” The Hungarian leader has encouraged conflict de-escalation instead of military aid for the Kyiv regime, arguing that Western help has led to rising costs from the conflict.

For example, Orbán pointed out that Western embargoes have hurt the EU more than they have Russia. Such sanctions have been unsuccessful in altering the Kremlin’s stance on Ukraine as well.

Last September, Orbán also lambasted EU sanctions on Moscow, claiming that “EU citizens have become poorer, while Russia has not fallen on its knees.”

In September, Hungary’s Gulyás mentioned that a lasting peace after the Russo-Ukrainian conflict could only happen if Russia obtained security guarantees from the West.

Gulyás contended that Kyiv had no foreseeable chance of regaining territories it claims as its own from Russia. The Hungarian politician also added that “it is also clear that Russia does not pose a threat to Central Europe” as Moscow has not been able to attain a rapid and resounding victory in the conflict.

Additionally, Gulyás claimed that peace talks between Russia and Ukraine were impossible without American influence, adding that Kyiv’s Western backers “must give security guarantees to Russia, but definitely not NATO membership to the Ukrainians,” and that long-term peace between Moscow and Kiev could be ensured via peacekeepers.

In August, Orbán told former Fox News host Tucker Carlson that “without involving the Russians in the security architecture of Europe, we cannot provide a safe life for its citizens.”

Orbán reinforced his stance on Ukraine with Carlson, and even hinted that Ukraine could have joined NATO in 2008, when the United States broached the prospect, notwithstanding Russian concerns.

“Russia was not strong enough to stop it, so there was a real chance at the time to integrate the Ukrainians into NATO. But it was rejected” by European allies, Orbán declared.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also criticized Orbán for his position that there could be no military triumph for Ukraine and that the United States had to stop supporting Kyiv and seek peace with Russia instead.

Kyiv officials “have been worried that Viktor Orbán had not urged stopping weapon supplies to Ukraine and legitimizing the Russian aggression for some time,” Oleg Nikolayenko said in a Facebook post.

“Ukraine does not sell out its territories or its sovereignty. And neither will the world,” the Ukrainian diplomat stated.

Apart from Hungary, French President Emmanuel Macron also urged the West last December to consider how to offer security guarantees not only to Ukraine, but also to Russia, asserting that NATO must tackle Moscow’s concerns about the U.S.-led military alliance “coming right up to its doors and deploying weapons that could threaten Russia.”



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Discussions over security guarantees for Russia had intensified before the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in 2022.

In December 2021, Moscow presented a list of demands to the United States and NATO, asking the West to forbid Ukraine from joining the military bloc, while insisting that NATO should retreat to its borders as of 1997 prior to the bloc's enlargement. However, the West dismissed Moscow's requests.

Putin has repeatedly maintained that Ukrainian neutrality was a matter of "fundamental importance" to Russia, arguing that Kyiv's drive to join NATO was one of the key reasons behind Russia's military operation in 2022.

Moscow has added that Ukraine's militarization since a 2014 Western-backed coup in Kyiv Ukraine's continued assaults on separatists in Donbass were the key reasons for its crisis with Kyiv. Also, Russia regards its conflict with Ukraine as part of a wider U.S. proxy war against Russia.



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