



Written by [Paul Dragu](#) on August 13, 2025

Zelensky, EU Leaders Meet to Sway Trump Before Putin Summit

European leaders met Wednesday with the heads of Ukraine and the United States to dissuade President Donald Trump from making any bad deals during his upcoming meeting with Vladimir Putin.

According to reports, everyone including Trump emerged from the meeting in good spirits and agreement on a number of points. Among them is that Trump wouldn't negotiate territory deals on behalf of Ukraine, that he would try to schedule a follow-up trilateral meeting between him and the heads of both warring nations, and that he'd ask Putin for an immediate ceasefire as a condition for future talks. The leaders also discussed issues relating to Ukraine's future security, including potential NATO membership.



AP Images
Volodymyr Zelensky and Friedrich Merz

No Ceasefire

Trump said he doesn't expect Putin to agree to a ceasefire, [according](#) to multiple reports. The Russians have refused past ceasefire proposals on the basis that it would benefit Ukraine and its European allies. Over the last few months, Russian troops have consistently captured Ukrainian territory by besting an exhausted Ukrainian military depleted of manpower. Reports indicate that Russia has made especially significant pushes into the Ukraine-controlled portion of the Donetsk region during the last few days.

The Russians also view a temporary ceasefire as a way to give the Europeans more time to prepare for their potential entry into the fight on behalf of Ukraine. Several European nations are bolstering their militaries in the name of preparing for further Russia aggression. Russia, however, claims Europe is really planning to use Ukraine as an excuse to wage all-out war. We have documented the military buildup of European nations [here](#).

Chancellor Friedrich Merz of Germany, who has emerged as the most aggressive Russia hawk among major European leaders, and whose nation has significantly agreed to increase defense spending this year, coordinated Wednesday's meeting. Vice President J.D. Vance, Trump Special Envoy Steve Witkoff, and the leaders of France, the U.K., Poland, Italy, Finland, as well as those of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, also attended.

Mercurial Trump

The unsaid yet open concern among the Europeans is that Putin will flatter Trump into giving away the ranch. Merz said during a press conference after the meeting, "We Europeans are doing everything in our power to set the right foundations for this meeting, for we want Donald Trump to have success in Anchorage on Friday." Some news outlets have used the word "mercurial" to describe how the



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American president is perceived by the Europeans, which is a nice way of calling him inconsistent and easily persuadable.

The Russians have noticed this, too. When Trump announced he was giving Russia 50 days to make peace or face secondary sanctions of 100 percent, the Kremlin shot back with snarky comments about past demands and deadlines that were replaced by new demands and deadlines. Regarding the 50 days, they were right. A few days later, Trump shortened the deadline to “10 or 12” days. That deadline has come and gone, and Trump has only partially followed up on the threat. He signed an executive order leveling tariffs of 50 percent on India for buying Russian oil. But there are several nations buying Russian oil and gas, not just India.

Territorial Matters

Among the primary fundamental interests Merz was referring to during Wednesday’s discussion was territory. It was agreed that any conversation regarding the forfeit of Ukrainian land to Russia must be had with Kyiv in the center of the negotiations. Russia controls eastern border territories, including parts of the Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions. In total, with the inclusion of Crimea, Moscow controls about 20 percent of Ukraine. Moscow has made clear that any agreement to end the war will have to include new boundaries, territory that was gained at the cost of tens of thousands of Russian troops. The Trump administration agrees. Late last week, Trump told reporters that a deal will have to include some “land swapping,” although it’s unclear what land Russia would give up.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has, up until this week, refused to consider giving up any Ukrainian territory. He has even failed to recognize that Ukraine will not get Crimea back. But now, he has begun to budge. [According](#) to a *Wall Street Journal* summary of the meeting:

Merz said that Zelensky demonstrated in the meeting that Ukraine is ready to discuss territory, but Zelensky also said that the starting point for any negotiations must be the current battle-line.

The report reiterated that everyone at the meeting agreed that “any territorial discussions [need] to start from the current front lines.”

The New York Times [echoed](#) Zelensky’s purported openness to handing over some land:

[Merz and Zelensky] said that Ukraine would be willing to discuss changes in territory — including ceding some land to Russia — but that it would not discuss legally recognizing Russia’s occupation of parts of the country.

There is talk that Putin also wants Ukrainian land Russian troops don’t even yet control. *The Washington Post* [reported](#):

After that weekend meeting, Vance, in a television interview, endorsed at least one European position — that the current line of contact in eastern Ukraine should be the starting point of any talks — rejecting a Russian demand that Ukraine surrender its entire eastern Donbas area.



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To see what parts of Ukraine is controlled by Russia, click [here](#).

Security Concerns

Another major issue brought up was “security guarantees,” including Ukrainian membership in NATO. Apparently, Ukraine wants to retain the right to enter NATO. [Per](#) the *Times*:

The principles also include insisting on security guarantees for Ukraine after the war — including retaining its right to potentially join NATO in the future.

But Trump is not having it. *The Journal*:

France’s President Emmanuel Macron, who was in the meeting, said that Trump had made it clear that any security guarantees offered to Ukraine as part of a potential peace deal with Russia wouldn’t involve NATO.

Ukrainian admittance into NATO has always been one of Russia’s “root causes.” Russia will not accept a deal that allows Ukraine to become a member of NATO. The Kremlin views the international military cohort as an enemy alliance. A number of American foreign policy experts warned years ago that Russia will at some point take military action over NATO expansion into Eastern Europe. None other than Russia containment authority figure George Kennan [said](#), as far back as 1997, that “expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era,” adding that “such a decision may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion.”

Ukraine’s overtures to NATO are a relatively new development. Its government began aggressively working toward NATO membership after the 2014 Maidan Revolution, which fundamentally changed the makeup of the Ukrainian government. A commonly held belief outside of the mainstream is that the Maidan Revolution was not organic, but a coup orchestrated by Western intelligence groups including American ones. The goal was to swap out Ukraine’s then pro-Russian government for a pro-West one.

Countermove

In the meantime, while Western powers draw up demands to counter Russian ones, the Kremlin is warning that Ukraine is planning a false flag attack to spoil Trump and Putin’s Alaskan rendezvous. The Russians claim that Western journalists are already in position in the city of Chuguev, in the Kharkov region, ready to pin the blame on Moscow for any “attack.” [According](#) to a statement from the Russian Ministry of Defense:

Directly before the summit, on Friday, the Ukrainian Armed Forces are reportedly planning a staged strike using drones and missiles on one of the densely populated residential areas or a hospital, with a large number of civilian casualties. The Western journalists brought in are expected to immediately “document” the incident. As a result of this provocation by the Kiev regime, all responsibility for the strike and civilian casualties will be assigned to the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, with the goal of creating a negative media backdrop and conditions for derailing Russian-American cooperation on resolving the conflict in Ukraine.



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It's difficult to tell which, if any, of these players is operating in good faith. But what's clear is that the war has become very unpopular among Ukrainians. Two-thirds of the people want it to end and have given up on total victory. Their country has been under martial law since the Russian invasion, and their men are being snatched off the streets. What will they do if their leaders won't end the war?



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