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Ukraine's Zelensky Denies War with Russia at 'Stalemate'

By AFP

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AP/TASS

President Volodymyr Zelensky denied on Saturday that Ukraine's war with Russia had reached a "stalemate," pushing back at suggestions Western leaders were lobbying for peace talks.

The sprawling frontline between the two warring sides has barely moved in almost a year, with one senior Ukrainian official warning this week that the conflict was deadlocked.

"Time has passed, people are tired... But this is not a stalemate," Zelensky told a news conference in Kyiv with EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen.

The Ukrainian leader also rejected the idea Western countries were putting pressure on Kyiv to enter talks with Russia, amid reports U.S. and EU officials had discussed what such negotiations would entail.

"No one among our partners is pressuring us to sit down with Russia, talk to it, and give it

something," he said.

With the war now in its 20th month and Ukraine struggling to gain ground in its counteroffensive, Zelensky has regularly met Western leaders to try to stave off fatigue with the conflict.

Zelensky said the war between Israel and Hamas had also drawn attention away from Ukraine, and said that this was "Russia's goal".

"Of course, it's clear that the war in the Middle East, this conflict, is taking away the focus," Zelensky said.

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"We have already been in very difficult situations when there was almost no focus on Ukraine," he said, but added: "I am absolutely sure we will overcome this challenge."

Ukraine's backers, including the United States, have maintained they are ready to support Kyiv with military and financial support for as long as it takes to defeat Russia.

'Existential war'

Zelensky's comments came as EU Commission chief von der Leyen visited Kyiv to discuss Ukraine's progress toward joining the 27-member bloc.

Kyiv received EU candidacy status several months after Russia invaded last year, but analysts have warned it faces a long and difficult path to membership.

"You have reached many milestones," von der Leyen told Zelensky.

"Reforming your justice system. Curbing the oligarchs grip. Tackling money laundering and much more," she said.

"We should never forget you are fighting an existential war, and at the same time you're deeply reforming your country," she added.

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She said she was ‘confident’ Ukraine would progress with the accession process when these reforms were implemented.

The EU Commission has proposed an additional 50Bln euro [$54Bln] in funding for Ukraine until 2027, von der Leyen said.

'Good signals'

"Ukraine has come a long way," Zelensky said in his evening address, noting that many had not believed the country could so quickly win EU candidate status while at war.

The country was pressing ahead with measures to strengthen anti-corruption prosecutions and to better regulate lobbying, he added.

And he had heard "good signals" from von der Leyen on Ukraine's progress towards talks on EU membership, he said.

Almost all EU member states back further long-term aid for Kyiv, with only Hungary and Slovakia holding out.

The Commission now has until November 8 to submit a report on how much progress Ukraine and other EU hopefuls Moldova and Georgia have made ahead of a summit of the bloc in December.

Local officials said Russian shelling had killed two people Saturday, a woman in the central Poltava region and a man in the southern Kherson.

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