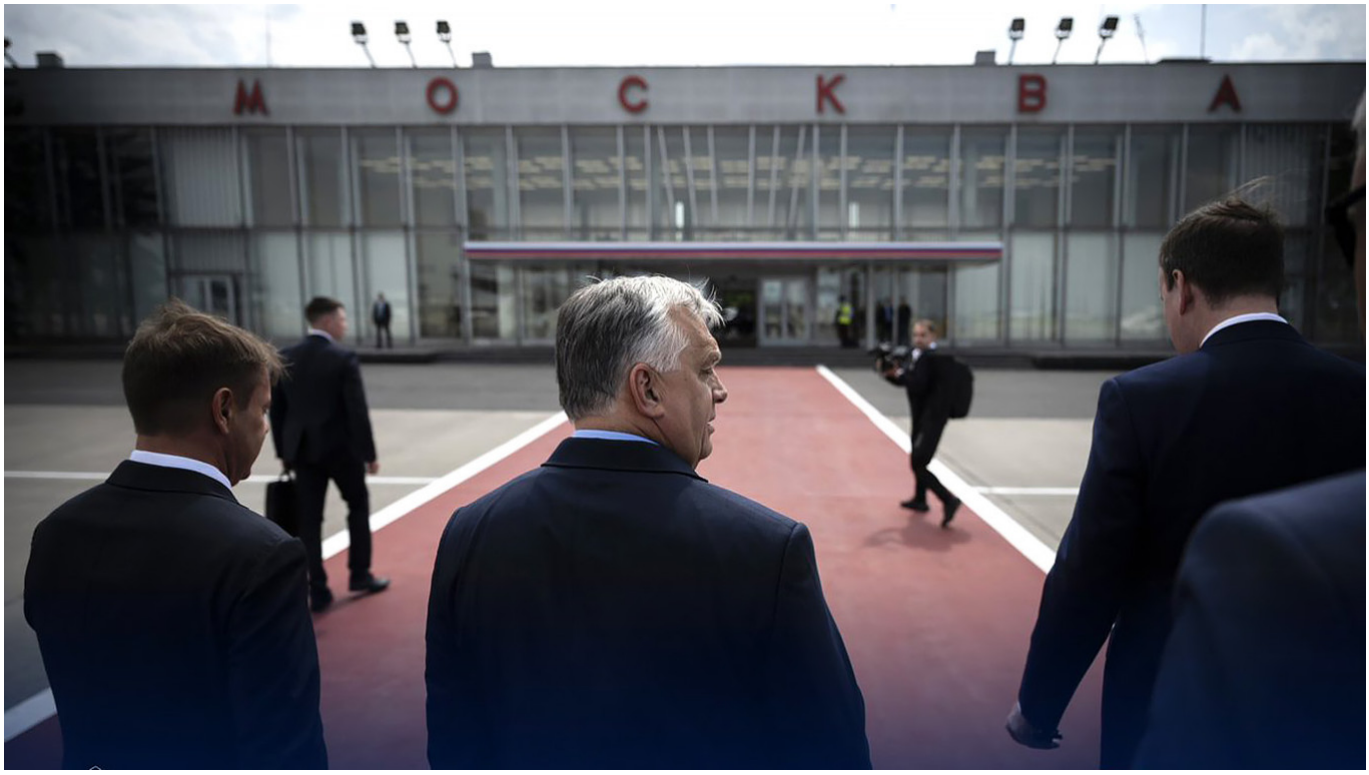
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Kyiv, Allies Slam Orban for Ukraine Talks With Putin

By AFP

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@PM_ViktorOrban / X

Kyiv and its Western allies hit out at Hungarian leader Viktor Orban on Friday after Russian President Vladimir Putin hosted him in Moscow for talks on the Ukraine war.

Putin told Orban, Russia's closest EU ally, that Ukraine must withdraw its troops from regions that Moscow has annexed if it wants peace.

But Kyiv was "not ready to drop the idea of waging war until a victorious end," he added, calling the talks at the Kremlin a "really useful, frank conversation" on the conflict.

EU officials, the United States and NATO blasted the Hungarian Prime Minister's surprise trip.

Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico offered a rare voice of support, saying he would have joined Orban had his health permitted after surviving an assassination attempt in May.

The Russian and Hungarian leaders "talked about the possible ways of resolving" the war in Ukraine, Putin said in remarks after a bilateral meeting.

Orban, who visited Kyiv earlier this week, in turn said "positions are far apart" between the two sides with "many" steps needed to achieve peace.

The visit came days after Hungary took over the EU's rotating presidency and Putin told Orban he expected him to outline "the position of European partners" on Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry lambasted the meeting, stressing that the trip "was made by the Hungarian side without any agreement or coordination with Ukraine."

No EU mandate

European Union leaders lashed out at Orban over the trip.

"Appeasement will not stop Putin," European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen wrote on X.

"Only unity and determination will pave the path to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine."

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement that Orban's "visit to Moscow takes place, exclusively, in the framework of the bilateral relations between Hungary and Russia."

"Orban has not received any mandate from the EU Council to visit Moscow," he added.

Related article: Hungary's Orban Calls for Ukraine Ceasefire to Speed Up Peace Talks

The EU has firmly opposed Russia's war in Ukraine, imposing 14 rounds of unprecedented sanctions on Moscow.

"That position excludes official contacts between the EU and President Putin. The Hungarian Prime Minister is thus not representing the EU in any form," Borrell said.

"It is worth recalling that President Putin has been indicted by the International Criminal Court and an arrest warrant released for his role in relation to the forced deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia."

EU Council chief Charles Michel had earlier reiterated the common stance that "no discussions about Ukraine can take place without Ukraine."

The White House also criticized the trip as "counterproductive" and the NATO military alliance, of which Hungary is a member, distanced itself.

Orban's visit "will not advance the cause of peace and is counterproductive to promoting Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

NATO head Jens Stoltenberg said Orban had informed the alliance of his trip but stressed the

Hungarian leader was "not representing NATO at these meetings. He is representing his own country."

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk expressed disbelief at Orban's Moscow trip, while Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo called it "disturbing news."

But Slovak leader Fico, whose country has like Hungary refused to send military aid to Ukraine, expressed his "admiration" for Orban's trips to Moscow and Kyiv.

"There are never enough peace talks and initiatives," Fico said in his first public appearance since a May 15 assassination attempt.

Orban demands 'action'

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian state TV the visit had been Orban's idea and Russian officials only heard about the trip on Wednesday — a day after Orban had visited Kyiv.

Hungary's six-month EU presidency gives the central European country sway over the bloc's agenda and priorities for the next six months.

Orban's visit to Moscow comes days after the right-wing nationalist made a surprise trip to Kyiv, where he urged Ukraine's leadership to work toward a rapid ceasefire with Russia.

The Hungarian leader on Friday insisted that peace cannot be achieved without dialogue.

"If we just sit in Brussels, we will not be able to get any closer to peace. Action must be taken," Orban said during his regular interview on Hungarian state radio when asked about his visit to Ukraine on Tuesday.

The visit is the first to Moscow by a European leader since a trip by Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer in April 2022.

Orban and Putin last met in October 2023 in Beijing, where they discussed energy cooperation.

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