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Hungary's Orban Tells EU that Putin, Xi Expect Ukraine Talks by End of 2024 – El Pais

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Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban told the European Union that Russian and Chinese leaders expect Ukrainian peace talks by the end of 2024, the Spanish daily El Pais reported Wednesday, citing his confidential reports filed after visiting the countries.

One of President Vladimir Putin's closest Western partners, Orban has sparked the ire of the EU and the United States with his self-described peace mission to Ukraine, Russia and China soon after taking over the rotating six-month EU presidency on July 1.

"Orban assures that Putin and [Chinese President Xi Jinping] assume that new peace talks will be held between Russia and Ukraine before the end of the year," El Pais wrote, citing the populist Hungarian leader's letter.

Commenting on the report, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko told the RBC

news website that peace talks would take place when Ukraine is ready and "assumes a more realistic stance."

El Pais reported that Putin told Orban he was "surprised" by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's rejection of his ceasefire proposal, assessing Ukraine's battlefield losses at 40,000 to 50,000 per month while declining to specify Russia's.

Last month, Putin said Russia would halt its offensive only if Ukraine fully withdrew its troops from the east and south and dropped its bid for NATO membership, a proposal that Kyiv slammed as a territorial "ultimatum" reminiscent of Adolf Hitler.

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AFP said it had also seen Orban's letter to European Council President Charles Michel that was shared with EU member countries. In it, Putin reportedly voiced openness to "any ceasefire proposal that does not serve the hidden relocation and reorganization of Ukrainian forces."

El Pais also reported that Putin considers the aborted spring 2022 Istanbul peace talks, which the Kremlin has promoted as a potential basis for new talks in recent months, as "relevant."

The Hungarian leader discussed the Russian-Ukrainian ceasefire in the context of upcoming U.S. presidential election, the publication reported.

Orban, who admires Republican candidate Donald Trump and presides over the EU with the slogan "Make Europe Great Again," reportedly told Xi:

"I put forward the idea that a new [U.S.] president-elect will face pressure to present a rapid political outcome, even before taking office. A ceasefire that precedes the peace talks, as well as rapid and intense peace talks, could be of interest to a new [U.S.] administration."

Xi "did not comment on the possibility of this scenario," El Pais said.

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