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Europeans Urge Trump to Push for Ukraine Ceasefire in Putin Summit

By Femke Colborne for AFP and Barbara Wojazer for AFP

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz shake hands after addressing a joint press conference ahead of a summit between the U.S. and Russian leaders. **Ralf Hirschberger / AFP**

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and his European allies urged U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday to support Kyiv and push for a ceasefire when he meets Russia's Vladimir Putin in Alaska this week.

A stepped-up Russian offensive, and the fact Zelensky has not been invited to the Anchorage meeting Friday, have heightened fears that Trump and Putin could strike a deal that forces painful concessions on Ukraine.

According to an AFP analysis of battlefield data from the U.S.-based Institute for the Study of War, Russian forces made their biggest 24-hour advance into Ukraine in more than a year on Tuesday.

As the war rages on in eastern Ukraine, Zelensky flew to Berlin and joined Chancellor Friedrich Merz on an online call with other European leaders, and the NATO and EU chiefs, in which they talked to Trump and urged a united stance against Russia.

French President Emmanuel Macron said afterwards that "the American will is to obtain a ceasefire."

Speaking in Berlin, Zelensky said that "we hope that the central topic at the meeting will be a ceasefire. An immediate ceasefire."

"Sanctions must be in place and must be strengthened if Russia does not agree to a ceasefire."

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But he also voiced doubt about Moscow's intentions and said: "I have told my colleagues, the U.S. president, and our European friends, that Putin definitely does not want peace."

Merz, standing beside Zelensky, also said that "a ceasefire must come first" before any peace talks and that Ukraine must "at the table" at any follow-up meeting after Alaska.

Any negotiations must include robust security guarantees for Kyiv and "be part of a joint transatlantic strategy," he said.

'Feel-out meeting'

Trump on Monday played down the possibility of a breakthrough in Alaska but said he expected "constructive conversations" with Putin.

"This is really a feel-out meeting a little bit," Trump said. But he added that eventually "there'll be some swapping, there'll be some changes in land."

Merz said "Ukraine is ready to negotiate on territorial issues" but also stressed that "legal recognition of Russian occupations is not up for debate."

Macron said that "territorial questions concerning Ukraine can be, and will be, negotiated only by the Ukrainian president."

Trump would also be pushing for a trilateral meeting with Putin and Zelensky in the future, Macron said, adding that he hoped such a meeting could be held in Europe "in a neutral country that is acceptable to all parties."

'Hope for movement'

After the call, European leaders voiced optimism on the path ahead.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said on X that "today Europe, the U.S. and NATO have strengthened the common ground for Ukraine.

"We will remain in close coordination. Nobody wants peace more than us, a just and lasting

peace."

NATO head Mark Rutte hailed a "great" call and wrote on X: "Appreciate Trump leadership and close coordination with Allies. The ball is now in Putin's court."

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Merz said the talks had been "really constructive" and the leaders had "wished President Trump all the best" with the meeting.

"There is hope for movement, there is hope for peace in Ukraine."

The Russian Foreign Ministry had earlier branded the frantic round of diplomacy "politically and practically insignificant" and an attempt at "sabotaging" U.S. and Russian efforts to end the conflict.

'Wool over our eyes'

Despite the upbeat comments, Russia's offensive in eastern Ukraine was gaining speed and seizing ground Wednesday.

With the world's eyes on the looming Alaska summit, Russia has made rapid advances this week in a narrow but important section of the front line in Ukraine.

The AFP data analysis showed that the Russian army took or claimed 110 square kilometers on Aug. 12 compared to the previous day. It was the most since late May 2024.

In recent months, Moscow has typically taken five or six days to progress at such a pace, although Russian advances have accelerated in recent weeks.

The head of the Donetsk region on Wednesday ordered civilians with children to evacuate from towns and villages under threat.

Ukrainian soldiers in Kramatorsk, an eastern city about 20 kilometers from the front, said they had low expectations for Trump's meeting with Putin.

Artem, a 30-year-old serviceman, said the war would likely continue for "a long time."

"Putin is massing an army, his army is growing, he is stockpiling weapons, he is pulling the wool over our eyes."

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