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Zelensky Says He Wants Security Guarantees Before Meeting With Putin

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Volodymyr Zelensky. **president.gov.ua**

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Thursday that he wants more clarity on potential Western security guarantees before agreeing to sit down for a face-to-face meeting with Russia's Vladimir Putin.

"We want to have an understanding of the security guarantees architecture within seven to 10 days," Zelensky said in comments to reporters. "We need to understand which country will be ready to do what at each specific moment."

Britain and France are leading efforts to form a military coalition to back the guarantees, whatever they end up being. Once an outline is agreed, Zelensky said U.S. President Donald Trump would like to see a bilateral meeting between him and Putin, but only in a "neutral" European country.

"Switzerland, Austria, we agree... For us, Turkey is a NATO country and part of Europe. And we are not opposed," he said of possible locations for that summit.

Related article: Trump and Putin Speak the Same Diplomatic Language. Zelensky Adapts, But Europe Struggles.

Zelensky previously said that the only way to end the war is through a three-way meeting with Trump and Putin. On Monday, Trump announced that plans are apparently underway for a summit between Putin and Zelensky, after which a trilateral session including himself could take place.

Russia has yet to confirm those plans. And in recent days, officials in Moscow have issued vaguely worded statements that suggest they are simply open to the idea in principle but not ready to make solid commitments anytime soon.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed this week that Putin has always been open to meeting with Zelensky in person, even though the Russian leader rejected such an offer in May, while also earlier questioning his Ukrainian counterpart's legitimacy as president.

On Thursday, Lavrov accused Ukraine of seeking "unrealistic" guarantees that were incompatible with Russia's demands, saying that any deployment of European troops in Ukraine as part of a peace plan would be "absolutely unacceptable."

The minister has demanded that Russia have an effective veto in security guarantees for Ukraine. He said that any discussions on the matter that do not include Moscow would be "a road to nowhere" and fail to address what it refers to as the "root causes" of the war.

Meanwhile, U.S. officials told The Guardian on Thursday that Trump plans to take a step back from peace talks for now as he waits for Ukrainian and Russian officials to organize a meeting between their two leaders.

"I just want to see what happens at the meeting. So they're in the process of setting it up and we're going to see what happens," Trump told talk show host Mark Levin on WABC earlier this week.

Despite Trump's flurry of diplomacy in recent weeks, including a summit with Putin in Alaska and a White House meeting with Zelensky and European leaders, little tangible progress in peace negotiations has emerged, and both Russia and Ukraine appear dug into their earlier positions.

AFP contributed reporting.

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