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Former Finnish President Urges Europe to Engage Putin Directly

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Former Finnish President Sauli Niinistö. **Finnish Government (CC BY 2.0)**

Finland's former president Sauli Niinistö has called on the European Union to open direct channels of communication with Russian President Vladimir Putin to press for an end to the war in Ukraine.

"I still see something rather absurd in the situation where Europeans declare that they won't talk to the war criminal Putin, yet Trump talks to him and then we go and listen to find out what they discussed," Niinistö said in comments to the Finnish state broadcaster Yle on Monday.

"At the same time, we slightly worry that they might talk over Europe's head," the former president added. "I think it might be wise for Europe, too, to hold those discussions itself, just as Trump does."

Niinistö served as Finland's president from 2012 to 2024 and oversaw the country's entry into NATO the year after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Finnish Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen pushed back against Niinistö's call for the EU to engage with Putin directly, saying it was not yet time for such talks due to the ongoing war in Ukraine and the Kremlin's apparent lack of interest in genuine peace negotiations. She told reporters that dialogue for its own sake is not the goal.

Prime Minister Petteri Orpo and Defense Minister Antti Häkkänen echoed her sentiment, saying that any eventual future contacts with Russia must be coordinated across the EU.

"We're stronger when we speak with one voice," Orpo was quoted as saying.

Finnish President Alexander Stubb said earlier this year that Helsinki should "mentally prepare" to restore relations with Russia after the war in Ukraine ends. The Kremlin responded that Putin was open to "mutually beneficial and respectful" ties with Finland if Helsinki sought the same.

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