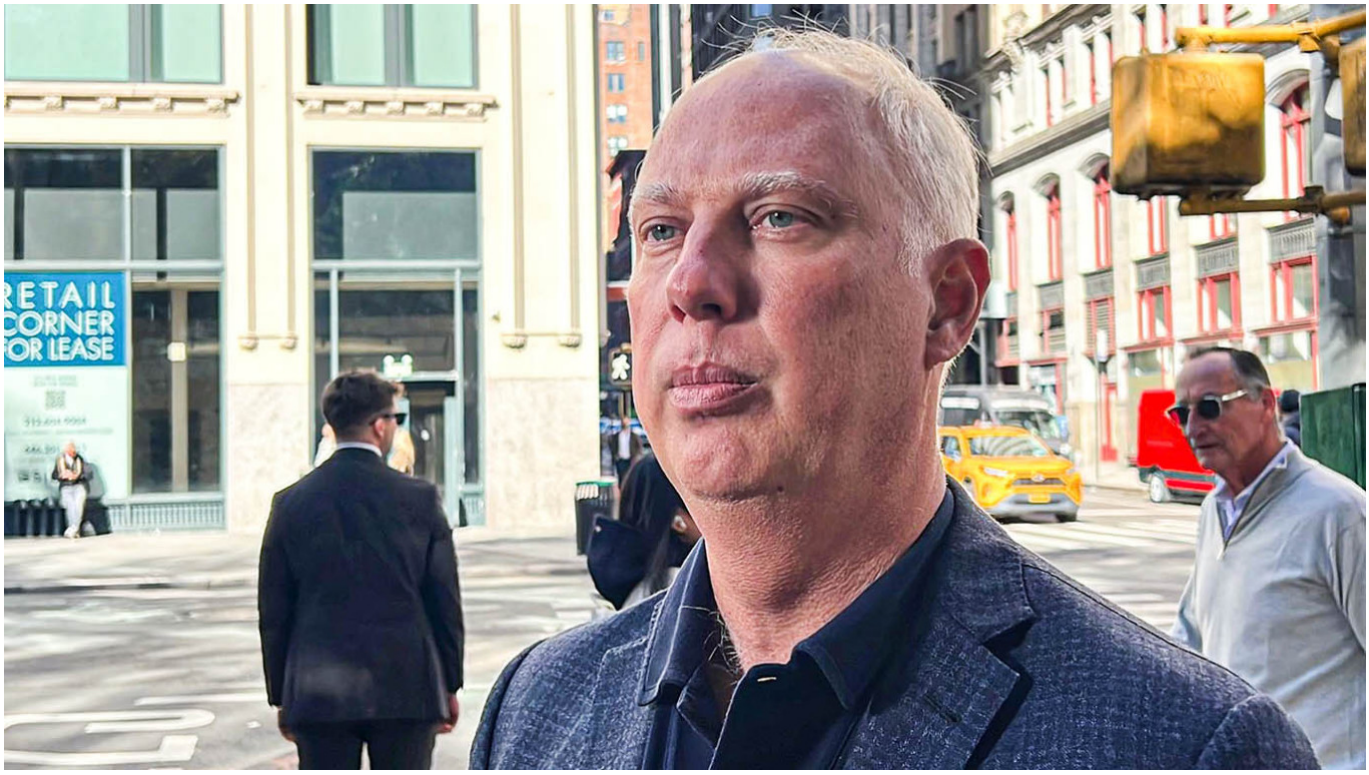
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Russian Envoy Dmitriev to Join Ukraine Talks in Miami

By AFP

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Putin envoy Kirill Dmitriev. **Denis Solovykh / TASS**

Russian envoy Kirill Dmitriev said on Saturday he was heading to Miami, where another round of talks to settle the Ukraine war was set to take place.

Ukrainian and European teams were also in the southern American city for the negotiations mediated by Donald Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff and the U.S. president's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Trump's envoys have pushed a plan in which the United States would offer security guarantees to Ukraine, but Kyiv will likely be expected to surrender some territory, a prospect resented by many Ukrainians.

However, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Friday promised not to force Ukraine into any agreement, saying “there's no peace deal unless Ukraine agrees to it.” He added that he may

join the talks on Saturday in Miami, his hometown.

“On the way to Miami,” Dmitriev wrote in an X post, adding a peace dove emoji and attaching a short video of a morning sun shining through the clouds on a beach with palms.

“As warmongers keep working overtime to undermine the U.S. peace plan for Ukraine, I remembered this video from my previous visit — light breaking through the storm clouds,” he added.

Russian and European involvement in the talks marks a step forward from an earlier stage, when the Americans held separate negotiations with each side in different locations.

However, it is unlikely Dmitriev would hold direct talks with Ukrainian and European negotiators as relations between the two sides remain extremely strained.

Russia, which sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022, argues that Europe's involvement in the talks would only hinder the process and tends to paint the continent's leaders as pro-war.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Saturday that Washington had proposed the first face-to-face negotiations between Ukraine and Russia in half a year.

“They proposed this format as far as I understand: Ukraine, America, Russia,” Zelensky said, adding that the Europeans could be present and it would be “logical to hold such a joint meeting... after we understand the potential results of the meeting that has already taken place.”

The last time Ukrainian and Russian envoys held official direct talks was in July in Istanbul, which led to prisoner swaps but little else in the way of concrete progress.

The weekend talks come after President Vladimir Putin vowed to press ahead with his military offensive in Ukraine, hailing Moscow's battlefield gains nearly four years into his war in an annual news conference on Friday.

Russia announced on Saturday it had captured two villages in Ukraine's Sumy and Donetsk regions, further grinding through the country's east in costly battles.

Meanwhile, the death toll in Ukraine's Black Sea Odesa region from an overnight Russian ballistic missile strike on port infrastructure rose to eight, with almost three dozen people wounded in the attack.

At the same time, Ukraine claimed to have destroyed two Russian fighter jets at an airfield in occupied Crimea, according to the security service SBU.

Putin ordered a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, describing it as a “special military operation” to demilitarize the country and prevent the expansion of NATO.

Kyiv and its European allies say the war, the largest and deadliest on European soil since World War II, is an unprovoked and illegal land grab that has resulted in a tidal wave of violence and destruction.

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