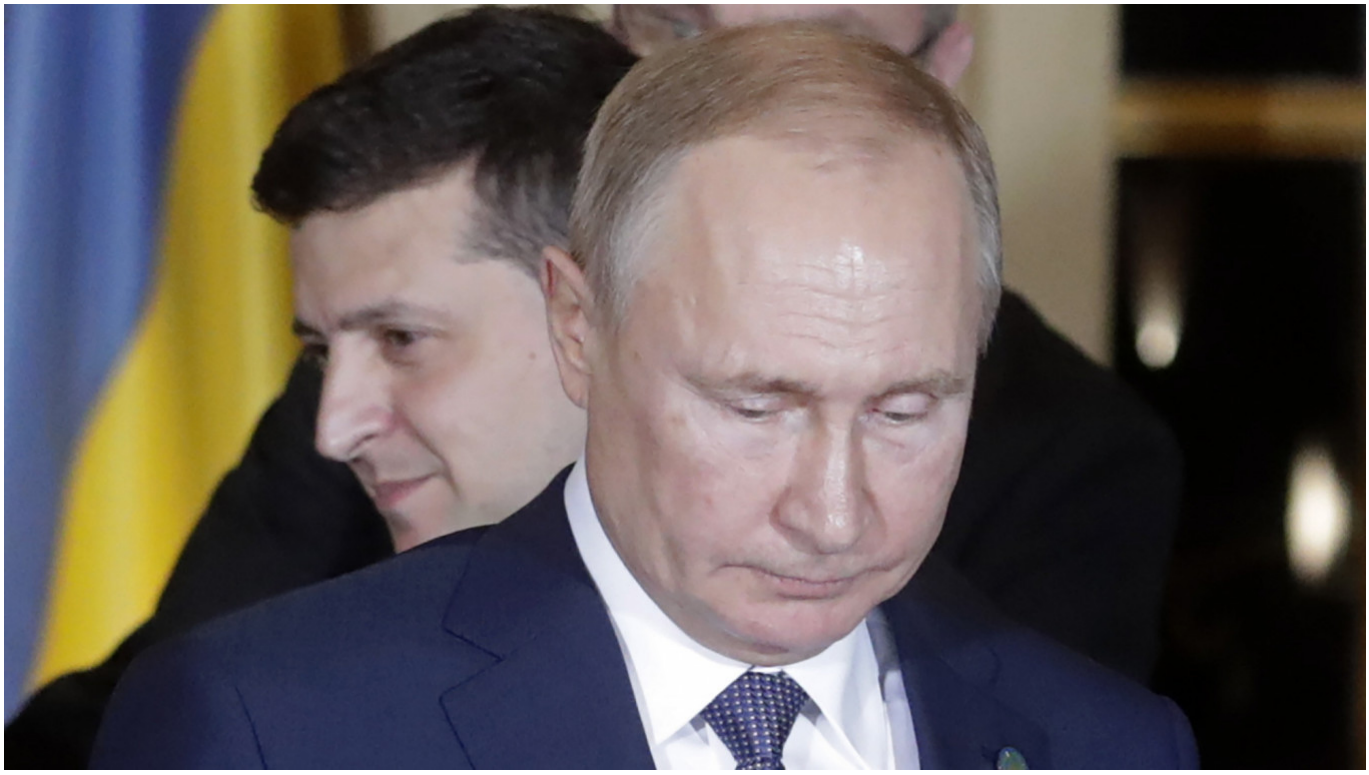
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

In Open Letter to Putin, Zelensky Calls for Meeting and Ceasefire

By AFP

June 04, 2026



The first and only in-person meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in December 2019 in Paris. **Mikhail Metzel / TASS**

Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky proposed a face-to-face meeting with Vladimir Putin in a rare open letter to the Russian leader Thursday, shortly after the Kremlin chief had conceded Moscow needed to strengthen its air defenses amid a spate of Ukrainian attacks.

The Kremlin said Putin had not yet been shown the letter, but that Zelensky could meet Putin in Moscow "any time" — a proposal that the Ukrainian leader preemptively ruled out in his letter.

"Ukraine proposes ending this war through direct engagement between us — and you. I am proposing a meeting," Zelensky said in the letter.

"I propose to set a clear date for such a meeting," he said.

"Ukraine is ready for a full ceasefire for the duration of the negotiations," he added.

Zelensky published the letter a day after Ukrainian drones hit Putin's hometown of St. Petersburg, which is hosting a major international economic forum this week.

Zelensky has repeatedly called for a meeting with the ex-KGB spy, saying only face-to-face talks will yield an agreement on territory.

Direct addresses from Zelensky to the Russian leader are rare.

Months of U.S.-led negotiations have failed to bring the sides close to an agreement.

Russia, which invaded in 2022, has demanded Ukraine pull out of its eastern Donbas region — large parts of which Kyiv's army still controls — as a precondition to peace talks.

Related article: Has the Tide Turned Against Russia in the Ukraine War?

Speaking to foreign journalists, including AFP, in St. Petersburg just before Zelensky's appeal was published, Putin had repeated his frequent questioning of the Ukrainian leader's legitimacy.

He said the question of whether Zelensky was Ukraine's legitimate leader needed "analysis," after his initial five-year term expired in 2024.

Martial law prohibits elections during wartime in Ukraine, and Zelensky has offered to stage a vote or referendum on a final peace deal if a full ceasefire is in place.

Putin has said he would only meet Zelensky to finalize an already agreed deal, rejecting calls to meet before then.

"Zelensky can come at any time to Moscow," state media quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying after the letter was published.

'Strengthen' air defenses

Ukraine has intensified its long-range retaliatory strikes on Russian energy and military targets in recent months — attacks it calls a fair response to nightly barrages by Russia's army.

"If you do not personally come to the conclusion that it is time to end this war, Ukraine will continue fighting for its existence," Zelensky said in the letter.

Putin on Thursday hailed his forces achievements on the battlefield in the face of growing confidence in Ukraine.

When asked about whether Russia's offensive against Ukraine had become a "strategic disaster," Putin said that Russia was "advancing along the entire line of contact."

"We are absolutely ready and willing to reach an agreement with Ukraine through peaceful

means," he added.

The pace of Russia's advance has slowed since late 2025, and recent data shows Ukraine has regained ground against Russia.

Ukraine recaptured more territory than it lost to Russian forces in May for the second straight month, according to an AFP analysis of data from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW).

Putin also admitted that Russia needs to improve its air defense systems, speaking a day after Ukrainian drones struck an oil terminal and naval base in St. Petersburg, just as the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) — often called the "Russian Davos" — opened.

"Russia has an air defense system. Yes, we must improve it. Yes, we must strengthen it. And we will do so," the Russian leader said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/06/04/in-open-letter-to-putin-zelensky-calls-for-meeting-and-ceasefire-a92935