

EU leaders reaffirm support for Ukraine in war with Russia



European Council President António Costa and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at Thursday's meeting of the European Council in Brussels.

Last Wednesday, as the leaders of the EU gathered in Brussels for the meeting Wednesday of the EU-Western Balkans summit and the meeting Thursday of the European Council, which consists of the heads of state or government of the 27 member states, several of them, including French President Emmanuel Macron, met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. After Macron's meeting on Wednesday with Zelenskyy, the French government said, "President Macron again condemned in the strongest terms the indiscriminate Russian strikes on energy infrastructure and cities in Ukraine which have taken place in the last few days. He expressed his wholehearted support for the bereaved and all Ukrainian people in a particularly difficult winter context." The government said Macron "repeated to President Zelenskyy that France, with its European partners, was making continued, increased support for Ukraine its absolute priority. It would continue giving Ukraine the means to defend itself and defeat the war of aggression waged by Russia for nearly three years now." And it said that in line with the trilateral meeting between Macron, President-elect Trump, and Zelenskyy in Paris on Dec. 7, Macron "indicated that he would continue to maintain close dialogue with Ukraine and all its international partners to work towards the return to a just and lasting peace, in accordance with the UN Charter."

After meeting with Macron, Zelenskyy met, also on Wednesday, with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, who said, in welcoming him, "We will have talks, the two of us, and also with our delegations and then later on, some of our European colleagues will join. They are meeting here in Brussels and this is an opportunity also to sit with them and very much high on the agenda is to make sure that the President, his team, Ukraine,

are in the best possible position one day when they decide so to start the peace talks. And that means that we have to do everything now to make sure that when it comes to air defense, when it comes to other weapon systems, that we make sure that we provide whatever we can. We know your request, Volodymyr, to make sure that, I think it is 19 systems are delivered to Ukraine to protect the critical infrastructure. So this will all be on the agenda, plus how to make sure that when peace comes one day, that we also think about the economy of Ukraine now, but also after a future peace deal.” After his meeting with Rutte, Zelenskyy wrote on social media, “Our talks focused on strengthening air defense for Ukraine and ensuring the reliability of the peace we are collectively working to achieve. We thank Mark, NATO Secretary General, and all our partners for their willingness to more actively enhance our air shield and work together for effective security guarantees.”

During a press briefing on Dec. 18, Zelenskyy reiterated what he had said on Dec. 9, two days after meeting with Macron and Trump in Paris – that Ukraine “may consider” Trump’s proposal that European troops monitor a potential ceasefire in Ukraine, but only if it receives a clear timeline for NATO membership. During his visit to Brussels, Zelenskyy reportedly discussed with European leaders the potential deployment of European peacekeeping forces, and in his press briefing he reiterated his position, adding that Ukraine “needs security guarantees, which we believe NATO membership offers most effectively.” (Ukraine applied for membership in NATO in September 2022 and in July NATO affirmed that Ukraine is on an “irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership.”)

In its conclusions from Thursday’s meeting, the European Council said it “reiterates its resolute condemnation of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of the UN Charter, and reaffirms its continued support for Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. It also reconfirms the European Union’s unwavering commitment to providing continued political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes and as intensely as needed. Russia must not prevail.” It said it “reaffirms its support for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on the principles of the UN Charter and international law, in line with the key principles and objectives of Ukraine’s Peace Formula, and underlines the principle that no initiative regarding Ukraine be taken without Ukraine.”

Continuing, the EU leaders said they had “reviewed work done on the delivery of military support to Ukraine. To help Ukraine to defend itself effectively against Russia’s aggression, the European Council calls for the urgent stepping up of efforts, in particular on the delivery of air defence systems, ammunition and missiles, as well as on the provision of necessary training and equipment for Ukrainian brigades.” The leaders underlined “the importance of intensifying work to further support and develop Ukraine’s defence industry and to deepen its cooperation with the EU defense industry.” They recalled “the importance of the implementation of all components of

the G7 ‘Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration Loans for Ukraine’ (ERA) initiative, including the military needs component,” and called for decisions under the European Peace Facility to be operationalized as soon as possible. They also called on the Council of Ministers “to accelerate work to strengthen the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine.” They welcomed the “steadfast implementation” of the Ukraine Facility, noting that total payments to Ukraine under the Facility in 2024 will amount to €16.2 billion and that disbursements from the Facility in 2025 are expected to reach €12.5 billion. In addition, they welcomed the “rapid implementation” of the G7 ERA initiative amounting to €45 billion to support Ukraine’s current and future military, budget and reconstruction needs and said that under that initiative the EU plans to start disbursements in January for a total of €18.1 billion in 2025.

The EU leaders said “the European Council strongly condemns Russia’s intensified and deliberate campaign against Ukraine’s energy and other civilian infrastructure which aims to weaponize the onset of winter. It calls for material support to be increased and its delivery accelerated in order to help Ukraine keep its electricity infrastructure running. In this context, the European Council commends Member States, notably Ukraine’s neighbours, for their exports of electricity to Ukraine and stresses the need to continue increasing these.” The leaders said, “efforts to further limit Russia’s ability to wage war must continue. In this context, the European Council welcomes the adoption of the 15th package of sanctions against Russia....It also reiterates its call for the full and effective enforcement of sanctions and for further means and measures to counter their circumvention, including through third countries. The EU remains ready to step up pressure on Russia, including by adopting further sanctions. Subject to EU law, Russia’s [financial] assets should remain immobilized until Russia ceases its war of aggression against Ukraine and compensates it for the damage caused by the war.” The leaders also strongly condemned support by third countries – most notably, North Korea and Iran – which have enabled Russia to sustain its war of aggression against Ukraine. In concluding their discussion of the situation in Ukraine, the leaders said the EU “remains committed to supporting Ukraine’s repair, recovery and reconstruction, in coordination with international partners,” and noted that the Ukraine Recovery Conference, to be hosted by Italy in July 2025, will be important in that regard.

The leaders also discussed the situation in Moldova and Georgia. In regard to Moldova, the EU leaders commended the government for its successful conduct of the presidential elections and the referendum on enshrining EU accession in the Constitution “despite hybrid activities by Russia to undermine the country’s democratic institutions.” The leaders said the EU will continue to work closely with Moldova “to enhance the country’s resilience and stability and to support its reform efforts on its European path” and invited the Commission to “look urgently into further ways to provide assistance to Moldova in strengthening its energy security.”

In contrast, the EU leaders were strongly critical of the government in Georgia, where protests that began after the conservative and pro-Russia governing Georgian Dream

party won an overwhelming victory in the October 26 parliamentary election continued after the government announced a month later that Georgia was suspending its talks with the EU pertaining to accession until 2028 and would not accept any budgetary support from the EU, in effect stopping the accession process. The EU leaders, recalling their conclusions of June and October, reiterated their “serious concerns regarding the course of action taken by the Georgian government, which runs counter to the values upon which the EU is founded. It regrets the Georgian government’s decision to suspend the country’s EU accession process until 2028. The European Council strongly condemns the violence against peaceful protesters, politicians and media representatives. The Georgian authorities must respect the right to freedom of assembly and of expression, and refrain from using force. All acts of violence must be investigated and those responsible held accountable.” The EU leaders nevertheless underlined “the Union’s readiness to support the Georgian people’s European aspirations, and the country’s path towards accession should the Georgian authorities reverse their present course of action.”

David R. Cameron
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