

EU leaders underscore their support for Ukraine and EU defense, while the U.S. and Ukraine arrange to meet in Saudi Arabia



As Friday's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation in Ukraine, above, indicates, last week the Russian forces continued to attack, as they have for the past several months, toward Kupiansk in Kharkiv region, toward the area around Chasiv Yar, west of Bakhmut which they took in 2023 after a prolonged siege, and toward Pokrovsk, west of Avdiivka which they took last February. But as the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported in its daily updates last week, the Russian forces also continued to attack toward Kharkiv from territory they hold north of the city, toward Lyman about 30 kilometers southeast of Izium, toward Kramatorsk about 25 kilometers northwest of Chasiv Yar, toward Toretsk about 20 kilometers south of Chasiv Yar, toward Vremivka about 50 kilometers south of Pokrovsk, in the Orikhiv area southeast of Zaporizhzhia, and toward the area in Kherson region in southern Ukraine where the Ukrainian forces hold territory on the east bank of the Dnipro River. They also continued, with the assistance of North Korean troops, to attack the Ukrainian forces that, since their August incursion, have held a portion of Russia's Kursk region just north of Sumy.

The General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported a total of 864 Russian attacks at various points along the contact line between the forces in the seven days last week from Sunday, March 2, through Saturday, March 8. As in previous weeks, the largest number of Russian attacks in eastern Ukraine were those directed at the Ukrainian forces defending Pokrovsk, an important transit hub on the highway that links Donetsk city with Dnipro and that, if taken, would also open a pathway northward for the Russian forces toward Kostyantynivka, Kramatorsk and Sloviansk. Over the seven days last week, the Russian forces conducted a total of 142 attacks against the

forces defending Pokrovsk. But Pokrovsk and its surrounding area wasn't the only target of repeated attacks by the Russian forces last week; they also conducted 138 attacks against the forces defending Toretsk and 108 attacks against the forces defending Lyman. And assisted by North Korean troops, the Russian forces conducted 218 attacks last week against the Ukrainian forces which, since last August's incursion, have held a portion of Russia's Kursk region northeast of Sumy.

While the war continued last week, the European Council, which consists of the leaders of the 27 member states of the European Union, European Council President Costa, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, met on Thursday, discussed recent developments in the war with President Zelenskyy, and agreed on the need for a permanent peace in Ukraine and the need for the EU to do more in regard to European security and defense policy.



European Council President Costa, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, and European Commission President von der Leyen after Thursday's meeting of the European Council.

After discussing the latest developments in the war, the leaders reaffirmed their “continued and unwavering support for Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.” And recognizing that Russia’s war of aggression has wider implications for European and international security, the leaders “underlined the need to put an end to it through a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on the principles of the UN Charter and international law. The European Council welcomes all efforts towards achieving such a peace.”

They said, “In view of the new momentum for negotiations that should lead to such a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, the European Council underlines the importance of the following principles: a) there can be no negotiations on Ukraine without Ukraine; b) there can be no negotiations that affect European security without Europe’s

involvement. Ukraine's, Europe's, transatlantic and global security are intertwined; c) any truce or ceasefire can only take place as part of the process leading to a comprehensive peace agreement; d) any such agreement needs to be accompanied by robust and credible security guarantees for Ukraine that contribute to deterring future Russian aggression; e) peace must respect Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Continuing, the leaders said, "Achieving 'peace through strength' requires Ukraine to be in the strongest possible position, with Ukraine's own robust military and defense capabilities as an essential component. This applies before, during and after negotiations to end the war. To that end, the EU remains committed, in coordination with like-minded partners and allies, to providing enhanced political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people, and to stepping up pressure on Russia, including through further sanctions and by strengthening the enforcement of existing measures, in order to weaken its ability to continue waging its war of aggression. The EU will continue to provide Ukraine with regular and predictable financial support. In 2025, it will provide Ukraine with €30.6 billion, with disbursements from the Ukraine Facility expected to reach €12.5 billion, and €18.1 billion under the G7 ERA [Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration] initiative repaid by the windfall profits stemming from immobilized Russian assets. The European Council calls on the Commission to swiftly take all necessary measures to frontload financing under the above instruments. It also urges the Commission and Member States to use all options under the Ukraine Facility to increase financial support to Ukraine."

The EU leaders also reviewed work done on the delivery of military support to Ukraine and said the European Council "welcomes the readiness of Member States to urgently step up efforts to address Ukraine's pressing military and defense needs, in particular the delivery of air defense systems, ammunition and missiles, the provision of necessary training and equipment for Ukrainian brigades, and other needs that Ukraine may have. It highlights in that regard the important role of the European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine). The European Council calls on the Council to advance work swiftly on initiatives, notably that of the High Representative, to coordinate increased EU military support to Ukraine, including the military needs component of the G7 ERA initiative." [Kaja Kallas, who served as Prime Minister of Estonia in 2021-24, was appointed in 2024 to replace Josep Borrell as the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.]

"In the light of negotiations for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, the EU and Member States are ready to further contribute to security guarantees based on their respective competences and capabilities, in line with international law, including by exploring the possible use of common security and defense policy (CSDP) instruments. Security guarantees should be undertaken together with Ukraine, as well as with like-minded and NATO partners." And underscoring "the inherent right of Ukraine to

choose its own destiny, based on the UN Charter and international law,” the leaders said the EU “will intensify support for Ukraine’s reform efforts on its path towards EU membership.” The text in which the leaders’ position in regard to Ukraine was set out – document EUCO 10/25 – “was firmly supported by 26 Heads of State or Government.” The 27th, Prime Minister Orbán of Hungary, didn’t support the text.

Turning to the issue of European defense, the leaders emphasized that “Europe must become more sovereign, more responsible for its own defense and better equipped to act and deal autonomously with immediate and future challenges and threats with a 360° approach. Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and its repercussions for European and global security in a changing environment constitute an existential challenge for the EU. In this context, the EU will accelerate the mobilization of the necessary instruments and financing in order to bolster the security of the EU and the protection of our citizens. In doing so, the Union will reinforce its overall defense readiness, reduce its strategic dependencies, address its critical capability gaps and strengthen the European technological and industrial base accordingly across the Union so that it is in a position to better supply equipment in the quantities and at the accelerated pace needed.”

Toward that end, the EU leaders said, “The European Council stresses the need to continue to substantially increase expenditure on Europe’s security and defense, and:

- a) welcomes the intention of the Commission to recommend to the Council the activation, in a coordinated manner, of the national escape clause under the Stability and Growth Pact as an immediate measure, and calls on the Commission to explore further measures, taking into account the views of the Council, while ensuring debt sustainability, to facilitate significant defense spending at national level in all Member States;
- b) calls on the Commission to propose additional funding sources for defense at EU level, including by means of additional possibilities and incentives offered to all Member States...in the use of their current allocations under the relevant EU funding programmes, and to swiftly present relevant proposals;
- c) takes note of the intention of the Commission to put forward a proposal for a new EU instrument to provide Member States with loans backed by the EU budget of up to €150 billion, and invites the Council to examine this proposal as a matter of urgency;
- d) welcomes the recent letter by the President of the European Investment Bank Group and the plans therein to step up support for Europe’s security and defense industry...;
- e) underlines the importance of mobilizing private financing for the defense industry and invites the Commission to consider measures in this regard;...f) identifies the following first list of priority areas for action at EU level in the field of capabilities taking into account the lessons learned from the war in Ukraine; in accordance with the work already done in the framework of the European Defense Agency and in full coherence with NATO: air and missile defense; artillery systems, including deep precision strike capabilities; missiles and ammunition; drones and anti-drone systems; strategic enablers, including in relation to space and critical infrastructure protection; military mobility; cyber; artificial intelligence and electronic warfare;
- g) underlines that the defense of all EU land, air and

maritime borders contribute to the security of Europe as a whole, in particular as regards the EU's eastern border, considering the threats posed by Russia and Belarus; h) in addition, considering the threats on the rest of the EU borders, stresses the importance of their defense; i) stresses the importance of more systematic aggregation of demand, harmonisation of requirements and joint procurement with the aim of reducing overall costs, ensuring standardisation and interoperability and offering European industry...greater predictability, as well as contributing to a well-functioning market for the defence industry... j) invites the European Defense Agency, with the High Representative, the Commission and Member States, to swiftly review the appropriate processes to that end; k) invites the co-legislators to conclude the negotiations on the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) as soon as possible; l) underlines the importance of continued support for research, innovation and development through the European Defence Fund; and m) calls on the Commission and the co-legislators to swiftly take work forward on simplifying the legal and administrative framework...in order to address all obstacles and bottlenecks hindering a rapid ramping up of the defence industry....The European Council also recalls that a stronger and more capable EU in the field of security and defense will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains, for those states that are members of it, the foundation of their collective defense. It invites the Member States that are also NATO allies to coordinate ahead of the NATO Summit in June 2025.”

Between Trump's call to Putin and the U.S. talks with Russia in Riyadh two weeks ago, Trump and Vance's angry words to Zelenskyy at the White House a week later, and Trump's decisions last week to “pause” U.S. military assistance for Ukraine and stop providing it with intelligence information about incoming Russian attacks, the last few weeks have been difficult ones for Ukraine and Zelenskyy. But at least they know, after Thursday's meeting of the European Council, they still have friends in Europe.

In a potentially important development after the angry comments of Trump and Vance when Zelenskyy visited the White House ten days ago, on Friday Zelenskyy announced that he planned to visit Saudi Arabia today ahead of talks with an American team led by Secretary of State Rubio. He said he would be accompanied by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Sybiha and Defense Minister Umerov. Also on Friday, Sybiha spoke with Rubio and had what he later described as a “constructive conversation” with him, while a State Department readout said Rubio “underscored that President Trump is determined to end the war as soon as possible and emphasized that all sides must take steps to secure a sustainable peace.” Yesterday, speaking with journalists on Air Force One, Trump said, “I think you're gonna have eventually – and maybe not in the distant future – you're gonna have some pretty good results coming out of Saudi Arabia this week.” Let's hope so.

David R. Cameron
March 10, 2025