

**After Victory Day Putin calls for peace talks in Istanbul,
leaders of Coalition of the Willing call for ceasefire before talks,
and Zelenskyy & Trump say they'll go to the talks**



Chancellor Merz, Presidents Macron and Zelenskyy, and
Prime Ministers Starmer and Tusk in Kyiv on Saturday.

On April 28, the Kremlin announced the Russian forces in Ukraine would observe a three-day ceasefire from the start of Thursday, May 8, until the end of Saturday, May 10, coinciding with Russia's celebration of Germany's formal surrender in Berlin on May 8, 1945. (The surrender took effect at 11:01 p.m. in Berlin, by which time it was already May 9 in Moscow.) Prior to 2023, Ukraine, like Russia, celebrated Victory Day on May 9. However, on May 8, 2023, President Zelenskyy signed a decree celebrating May 9 as Europe Day and submitted legislation to the Rada establishing May 8 as the Day of Remembrance and Victory over Nazism in World War II 1939–1945 in place of Victory Day, noting that the German surrender had entered into force on May 8, 1945. The Rada subsequently approved the proposal making May 8 the Day of Remembrance and Victory of Nazism in World War II 1939-1945, Zelenskyy signed the legislation into law on June 12, 2023, and the Day was first celebrated on May 8, 2024. Obviously, a substantial reason for renaming May 9 Europe Day, aside from the fact that the German surrender actually took place in Berlin in the evening of May 8, 1945, rather than on May 9, 1945 when the news got to Moscow, was the fact that May 9 has become for Russia a day marked by a large-scale military show of force, with several thousand troops plus tanks and ICBMs, in Red Square.

To no one's surprise, Russia ignored its proclaimed three-day May 8-10 Victory ceasefire and its forces continued their attacks against the Ukrainian forces

defending the cities and towns still under their control in eastern Ukraine. Indeed, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine reported that on May 8 the Russian forces conducted 193 attacks against the Ukrainian forces at various points along the contact line, on May 9 they conducted 196 attacks, and on May 10 they conducted 161 attacks – a total of 550 attacks over the three days. As a result, the Russian forces conducted a total of 1,386 attacks against the Ukrainian forces last week, only one attack less than the 1,387 they conducted against the Ukrainian forces in the previous week. As in the previous weeks, the largest number of attacks conducted by the Russian forces last week were those – 527 in all, only 16 fewer than the 543 attacks the week before – conducted against the forces defending the besieged city of Pokrovsk. During Russia’s proclaimed three-day ceasefire, the Ukrainian General Staff reported the Russian forces conducted a total of 196 attacks against the forces defending Pokrovsk.

Late in the evening Saturday, in concluding the celebration of the 80th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War, President Putin issued a statement thanking the leaders who visited Moscow and discussed various issues with him, including “the issue of resolving the conflict in Ukraine.” After noting that Ukraine had violated the 30-day moratorium from mid-March to mid-April on strikes against energy facilities and had not observed Russia’s three-day Easter truce and its three-day Victory ceasefire on May 8-10 – both of which, the Ukrainian General Staff reported, had been repeatedly violated by the Russian forces in Ukraine – Putin proposed that “the authorities in Kiev should resume the negotiations that they interrupted at the end of 2022 and resume direct talks. And I stress, without any preconditions. We suggest starting without delay next Thursday, May 15, in Istanbul, where they were held earlier and where they were interrupted. As you know, Turkish colleagues have repeatedly offered their services to organize such talks, and President Erdogan has done a lot to organize them.... Tomorrow we are going to have a conversation with the President of Türkiye, Mr. Erdogan. I would like to ask him to provide such an opportunity to hold talks in Türkiye. I hope he will confirm his desire to contribute to the search for peace in Ukraine.”

Turning to the focus of the proposed talks, Putin said, “We are set on serious negotiations with Ukraine. Their aim is to eliminate the root causes of the conflict and to achieve a long-term lasting peace for a historical perspective. We do not rule out that in the course of these negotiations it will become possible to agree on some kind of new truce and a new ceasefire. And a real ceasefire that would be observed not only by Russia but also by the Ukrainian side and would be the first step, I repeat, towards a long-term, sustainable peace, rather than a prelude to continuing armed conflict after the Ukrainian armed forces have been rearmed and re-equipped.... Our proposal is, as they say, on the table. The decision is now up to Ukrainian authorities Let me reiterate myself: Russia is ready for talks without any preliminary conditions. There are combat actions and war going on now, and we propose to resume negotiations that were not interrupted by us.... Those who really want peace cannot but support this.”

Soon thereafter, Putin spoke by telephone with Erdoğan, after which he reported they had a “thorough discussion” of Putin’s “initiative on resuming direct talks between Russia and Ukraine, which were proposed to be held in Istanbul starting on May 15.” He said Erdoğan “has expressed his full support for Russia’s proposal and emphasized his willingness to provide a venue for the talks in Istanbul. The Turkish side will offer all possible assistance in organizing and holding talks aimed at achieving sustainable peace.”

As Putin was proposing the resumption of peace talks in Istanbul, French President Macron, British Prime Minister Starmer, German Chancellor Merz, and Polish Prime Minister Tusk met with President Zelenskyy in Kyiv and jointly called for a full and unconditional ceasefire in the war starting today and lasting for at least 30 days. The leaders, who were accompanied by nearly two dozen other government leaders online, agreed that an unconditional ceasefire by definition can’t be subject to any conditions and said that if Russia called for such conditions that could only be considered as an effort to prolong the war and undermine diplomacy. They also agreed that the ceasefire must be comprehensive – in the air, at sea, and on land, and they underlined that it would require effective monitoring, which could be successfully implemented in close coordination with the U.S. They said the ceasefire should last for at least 30 days to create room for diplomacy and that the diplomatic work should focus on outlining the security, political and humanitarian foundations of peace. They welcomed the fact that the call for a ceasefire and meaningful negotiations is supported by both Europe and the U.S. they underlined the crucial importance of strengthening Ukraine’s Defense and Security forces as the primary guarantee of its sovereignty and security and said a key element of security guarantees to Ukraine should be a reassurance force provided by the Coalition of the Willing. They also agreed that if Russia refused a full and unconditional ceasefire, stronger sanctions should be applied to its banking and energy sectors, targeting fossil fuels, oil and the shadow fleet. They also agreed to pass a strong 17th EU sanctions package and to coordinate it with sanctions imposed by the UK, Norway, and the U.S. And they agreed to continue working on the effective use of frozen Russian assets and to discuss that subject at the next G7 summit. They also expressed their readiness to further strengthen Ukraine’s defense, especially the Ukrainian army, including funding defense resilience and investment in arms production in both Ukraine and in European countries in the framework of joint projects.

In a post on X Sunday, Zelenskyy said it was a “positive sign that the Russians have finally begun to consider ending the war” and said, “the entire world has been waiting for this for a very long time.” But, he added, “the very first step in truly ending any war is a ceasefire and we await a full and lasting ceasefire, starting from tomorrow, to provide the necessary basis for diplomacy. There is no point in prolonging the killings, even for a single day. We expect Russia to confirm a ceasefire – full, lasting, and reliable – starting tomorrow, May 12th, and Ukraine is ready to meet. And I will be waiting for Putin in Türkiye on Thursday. Personally, I hope that this time the Russians will not look for excuses.”

In a social media post on Sunday, President Trump said Ukraine should agree to Putin's proposal "IMMEDIATELY. At least they will be able to determine whether or not a deal is possible, and if it is not, European leaders and the U.S. will know where everything stands and can proceed accordingly. HAVE THE MEETING, NOW!!!"

But Merz, also in a post on Sunday, said, "If the Russian side now signals a willingness to talk, that is initially a positive sign. But it is far from sufficient. We expect Moscow to now agree to a ceasefire that allows real talks to take place. First the weapons must be silenced, then the discussions can begin." He noted that the European allies support a 30-day truce, which Ukraine has said it would accept without reservation. Likewise, Macron, speaking with reporters in Poland on Sunday, said, "An unconditional ceasefire is not preceded by negotiations, by definition." He said Putin "is looking for a way out, but he still wants to buy time. We need to stand firm with the Ukrainians and say that the ceasefire is unconditional. And we can discuss the rest."

Yesterday, speaking after a Russian drone attack on Kharkiv, Zelenskyy said, "This was another Russian strike on an energy facility – a purely civilian one. Russia is being Russia. While everybody awaits their response to a ceasefire and direct negotiations, they respond with new strikes and attacks. The only one dragging out the war, the only one responsible for both the start and the continuation of the war, is Russia. The entire world understands this clearly. Pressure is essential – pressure to make Moscow stop thinking that the world can still wait. An end to the war is needed – a dignified and just one. Russia talks a lot about direct negotiations, but when it comes down to it, they hide. Decisions must be made. And they must be made with the one who is truly in control of what happens next. Right now, our team is actively preparing for a visit to Türkiye. Today, we have presented Ukraine's position to all our partners in detail. I want to thank them for their support. Every call for a long-lasting and unconditional ceasefire matters. Calls for direct negotiations at the highest level are equally important. Putin is the one who determines everything in Russia, so he is the one who has to resolve the war. This is his war. Therefore, the negotiations should be with him."

Will the peace talks, which took place in Istanbul sporadically throughout much of 2022, resume in Istanbul tomorrow? We don't yet know. Germany, France, and Ukraine have made it clear that there should be a ceasefire before the talks begin and there has not yet been a ceasefire, and Russia appears to be unwilling to agree to one prior to the talks. For that matter, in the wake of Zelenskyy's comment that he will be in Türkiye Thursday, we also don't know who will represent the two sides in the talks if they do in fact begin tomorrow in Istanbul.

However, late this evening, Russia announced that President Putin has appointed a delegation of senior officials who will participate in tomorrow's direct talks with Ukraine in Istanbul. Vladimir Medinsky, who led the Russian delegation in the previous negotiations with Ukraine that took place in the months after the war began in 2022, will head the delegation, which will include Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin, Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin, and Igor

Kostyukov, the head of GRU, the military intelligence agency. The delegation also includes a number of senior officials from the Foreign and Defense ministries and the presidential administration. Putin is not a member of the delegation and Russian officials said he has no intention of meeting with Zelenskyy at this stage in the talks. Meanwhile, an unnamed Ukrainian official told reporters late this evening that Zelenskyy was on his way to Ankara, where he will meet with President Erdoğan.

There has been some speculation that Trump may meet with Putin and Zelenskyy, possibly in Ankara, while the talks are going on in Istanbul. Speaking with reporters on Air Force before the Russian delegation was announced, Trump said, referring to Putin, “I don’t know if he’s showing up. I know he would like me to be there. And that’s a possibility.”

There are many – most notably, of course, all those Ukrainians and Russians who have fathers, sons, or brothers on the front lines in eastern Ukraine, but also many, many others around the world as well, who hope the two sides will, with or without their presidents in attendance, meet tomorrow in Istanbul at the start of the peace talks and, as their first act, will agree to an immediate ceasefire. After all, as Macron pointed out, how can there be peace talks if there is no ceasefire?

David R. Cameron
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