EU Defence Ministers meet & discuss Russia's war against Ukraine. As they do, reports come out about Russian drones at German airport.

EU Defence Ministers and officials at today's meeting in Wicklow, Ireland.

Today and tomorrow, the Defence Ministers and Foreign Ministers of the 27 member states of the European Union are meeting informally at Wicklow in Ireland, which holds the rotating presidency of the Council. Today the Defence Ministers met. The meeting was co-chaired by Kaja Kallas, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Helen McEntee, Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and Minister for Defence.

In her comments following the meeting, Kaja Kallas, the former Prime Minister of Estonia and, since 2024, the EU's High Representative, understandably focused on Ukraine: "Russia's war," she said, "is becoming more ruthless and destructive, but it is unfortunately not closer to ending. Russia's army is bogged down on the ground, and that is why they are killing civilians from the skies. And this is terror by design. In the Black Sea, Russian strikes on grain ships are deliberately putting global food supplies at risk. Russia is also hitting Europe with a wave of increasingly kinetic hybrid attacks. With this, Russia wants to scare us away from supporting Ukraine. They will not succeed. To the contrary, today also the discussions that we had, we will increase our support to Ukraine and invest in our own defence. This is the best way to stop Putin. We are also planning the most far-reaching sanctions against Russia yet." Continuing, she said, "Militarily, Ukraine is putting Russia under pressure. Ukrainian drones are disrupting Russian logistics and striking refineries deep inside Russia, causing the biggest fuel crisis in Russia in decades. Russia is losing well over 30,000 soldiers per month too. Overall, it has been a rough summer for Putin. As we heard today from the

Ukrainian Minister of Defence, air defence remains our top priority. But interceptors are in short supply everywhere. I thank Member States for looking again at their own stocks. Especially Patriot missiles about to expire should be sent or sold to Ukraine…. Every interceptor we provide to Ukraine means that a Russian missile does not reach a Ukrainian school, home, or hospital. And every support we give to Ukraine strengthens European security. The EU continues to provide strong support to Ukraine through the Ukraine Support Loan. The EU has already disbursed €8.37 billion in defence support, with more to come. However, continued bilateral support is still necessary." But unfortunately, when asked whether there were any firm commitments from one or more member states about providing Ukraine with more interceptor missiles for the Patriot air defense systems it has, the answer was "No, we did not get any concrete decisions today, but there were calls and talks about these missiles, and they will continue. Unfortunately, no concrete success today regarding this."

As if to underscore the continuing problem of Russian drones and missiles, as the EU Defence Ministers met the news came out that a Russian drone had been found in early August at the Leipzig/Halle Airport in Germany. Germany accused Russia of being responsible for a drone attack that targeted the airport on August 5 and announced several measures that have been taken in the wake of the discovery. "We are not at war, but we are a daily target of hybrid attacks," German Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt said today as he raised the country's threat level assessment from "general" to "high." And German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul ordered the closure of the Russian consulate in Bonn and the Russian House, a cultural center, in Berlin. Germany is also tightening controls on Russians entering the country. And EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the EU foreign ministers' meeting this week will announce a "clear response," including "additional sanctions."

The U.S. reportedly determined that the drone belonged to the Russian intelligence service. The incident caused major disruptions and obviously raised additional security concerns across Europe. According to German authorities, the drone was discovered inside a secure area of the airport on August 5 near the south runway, where cargo flights operate. A bomb disposal robot was deployed and the detonator attached to the drone was removed. Images of the scene showed the robot was close to a Ukrainian cargo plane. The same day, a second flying object – presumably another drone – hit a cargo plane near the airport, causing minor damage. The aircraft later landed safely in Hannover. Russia of course accused Germany of manufacturing a "pretext" and warned it would respond to any measures. NATO chief Mark Rutte welcomed the measures announced by Germany, said the alliance's commitment to Ukraine remains "unwavering," and reiterated that "NATO will continue to strengthen our ability to deter and defend all Allies against any threat – including malign actions like those seen in Leipzig."

German media recently reported that a third drone was found in a field near the airport about a week later, prompting speculation that multiple drones were used in the attack.

Leipzig/Halle is one of the busiest cargo airports in Europe and, importantly from Russia's point of view, it has been the base for Ukraine's Antonov Airlines cargo airline since its base in Hostomel, northwest of Kyiv, was destroyed in the early days of the war. The explosives-laden drone was found near one of the Ukrainian aircraft at the airport. Dobrindt said at the time, "Drone sightings, drone threats including in a hybrid context, are something we know from the past. That a drone armed with explosives is at an airport is a new threat scenario."

Western intelligence services have repeatedly pointed fingers at Russia over a series of seemingly unrelated security incidents across Europe. These have included arson, high-profile hacks, GPS jamming as well as sabotage actions against key infrastructure, including undersea communication cables, logistics centers and railways. The US has warned that Russia might escalate further and recent US intelligence assessments reportedly suggest Russia may test NATO's resolve by launching a limited attack on an allied country within the next few years, according to sources familiar with the reports.

In the meantime, Russia's war against Ukraine continues with no end in sight.

David R. Cameron
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