



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

# Is history repeating itself—the disagreement of the West over the Ukrainian peace the same as on the eve of the war



In connection with the increasingly frequent hints about the start of peace talks on Ukraine, analogies are often drawn from major events in history, but they will not be of much help in predicting the outcome of this process.

The presidents of the US and Russia, Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, for example, spoke by phone on 12 February, at the time when the conference of allied leaders in Yalta in the then-Soviet Union ended 80 years ago, when the post-war arrangement of Europe was agreed.

The Munich Security Conference, which began **today**, evoked associations with 1938, when an agreement was concluded in the Bavarian city between Hitler's Germany, the UK, France, and Mussolini's Italy.

For many reasons, the Munich forum, meeting for the 61st time as of today, was seen as an event where the beginning of the process to end three years of Russian aggression against Ukraine might not start, but at least a place where it could take shape.

The announcements made by some of the main participants at the conference suggest just that, although discussions will also focus on the crisis in the Middle East and security risks in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Trump's introduction to the MSC

The primary purpose of this year's MSC was to address the state of affairs within the Western security camp near the end of the war in Ukraine. This situation is not the best and is somewhat reminiscent of three years ago, when the ranks of Western allies were not particularly harmonious before Putin's decision to attack Ukraine.

US President Donald Trump did not come to the Munich conference, but his **platform** on Ukraine will dominate the discussions. He has also sent the strongest team to Germany to represent his administration's views on Russia and Ukraine.

US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth clearly **outlined** the American approach to NATO partners this week, which in almost every line disappoints first Kyiv and then the European partners.

According to this concept, Ukraine should not hope for NATO membership or the peace process to restore its sovereignty to pre-2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and began the occupation of eastern Ukrainian territories.

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- Pete Hegseth

"We must start by recognising that returning to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders is an unrealistic objective. Chasing this illusionary goal will only prolong the war and cause more suffering."

Secretary Hegseth also rejected the possibility of US troops participating in a possible peacekeeping contingent in Ukraine and emphasised that such an engagement by Western allies should not take place within the framework of NATO or on the basis of Article 5 of the NATO Charter.

On the first day of the MSC, US Vice President JD Vance softened this position somewhat, threatening Moscow with new sanctions in an **interview** with The Wall Street Journal, including the possibility of US troops coming to Ukraine if Moscow does not show the will to move towards a peace that secures Ukraine's sovereignty on a permanent basis.

## European response

Facing this American platform, which was perceived as a cold shower by the Ukrainians but also by the European partners, was made more difficult by the fact that the first long telephone **conversation** between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin took place at the same time as the announcement.

The Munich Security Conference is therefore taking place in an atmosphere of deep division among the allies, with the US on one side and everyone else, including Kyiv, on the other. The differences in approaches to influencing Russia and the models for future peace in Ukraine seem difficult to overcome.

Moreover, they are a clear indication of the return of Trump's approach to the European security alliance from his first term as president. And he has been far more inconsistent than he has been cooperative in the shared commitments to European security.

### The European allies defined the main point of contention: the participation of Europe and Ukraine in the peace talks

Washington's eagerness to give the Europeans a secondary role in concluding a peace deal with Russia was evident from the very beginning of the Munich Security Conference, and this aspect will make it go down in history.

Before the MSC, the European allies **defined** the main point of contention: the participation of Europe and Ukraine in the peace talks, which they clearly emphasised as a binding condition that America should fulfil.

"Ukraine and Europe must be part of any negotiations. Ukraine should be provided with strong security guarantees," announced the ministers of foreign affairs from the Weimar Plus group, which consists of Germany, France, the UK, Italy, Poland, Spain, and the EU.

## The Kremlin's expectations

The course with which Washington obviously intends to conduct peace negotiations on Ukraine will therefore hardly remain the exclusive preserve of the USA and Russia until the end.

A major bilateral deal with the USA over Ukraine would certainly please the Kremlin. Such a format would exclude Ukraine's leadership and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whom Moscow regards not only as an enemy but also as lacking legitimacy, from the talks.



*If a deal is made behind our backs, it simply won't work - Kaja Kallas*

Furthermore, a bilateral agreement between the USA and Russia would exclude or largely suspend the influence of the Europeans, whose attitude towards Ukraine is much more protectionist than that of the USA.

Nevertheless, marginalising Kyiv and the Europeans, in particular, from the peace talks is almost unthinkable. First of all, the European allies are by far the biggest donors to Ukrainian defence in the last three years of Russian aggression, with around USD 145 billion in assistance, including more than USD 50 billion in military aid.

More importantly, any agreement on Ukraine must include European participation in its implementation. It should be kept in mind that European banks hold the vast majority of the more than USD 300 billion in frozen Russian assets. Furthermore, the Europeans control all the major sanctions mechanisms to which Moscow is exposed.

"If a deal is made behind our backs, it simply won't work, because for any agreement to hold, Europeans must enforce it. You also need Ukrainians to abide by it," **said** Kaja Kallas, top EU diplomat.