



By: The Editorial Board

Trump and Putin in Budapest – a test for Europe



The announcement of a possible meeting between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin in Budapest has **triggered** a wave of reactions from Washington to Brussels.

The location was not chosen by chance. Budapest is the only European Union capital that maintains open relations with Moscow and the only EU territory that Putin could visit, even though he is under an International Criminal Court arrest warrant.

Trump has **confirmed** that talks are underway, while the Kremlin has stated that "there is a will, but also a number of technical issues" that need to be resolved.

There are no official details yet, but what has been confirmed is enough to understand the political significance and symbolism of the proposed meeting.

Tomorrow's Affairs was among the few global media outlets that, before the first meeting between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin in Alaska, while almost everyone was announcing a "historic shift", clearly **stated** that nothing substantial would occur.

Our analysis at the time warned that it would be a meeting for the cameras and that Putin would emerge as the only winner — and that is precisely what happened.

The meeting in Budapest is not a matter of diplomacy but a struggle to control the narrative. Trump wants to demonstrate that he can "end" the war in Ukraine at a time when US aid is entering a new phase and its purpose is being questioned in Washington.

Putin sees this as an opportunity to return to the European political arena — for the first time in three years, without a military threat and without the conditions that the West usually imposes.

Viktor Orbán, the host of the meeting, has **said** that "Hungary is the island of PEACE!" That statement is not an expression of neutrality but a clear political message: Budapest wants to be the channel through which Moscow re-

enters the game.

What is at stake?

Ukraine once again finds itself in a situation where others are discussing its fate. Zelensky was in Washington just a day before Trump's announcement, **trying** to secure Tomahawk missiles and assurances that American support would not be delayed.

The response was cold. Trump declared that he was "considering all options", while US media **reported** that the decision on new deliveries was "temporarily on hold". In practice, this means one thing — Washington is using the announced summit as a lever of pressure. Not towards Moscow, but towards Kyiv.

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Putin understands this, which is why he remains silent. Every statement from the Kremlin regarding the summit appears calculated, like the introduction to a show whose outcome is already known.

When Russian officials **speak** of "constructive dialogue", they are actually signalling a desire to maintain the status quo. Putin's goal is not an agreement but time.

Every week without new US arms deliveries wears down the Ukrainian army and strengthens Russian positions at the front. Budapest thus becomes a stage where peace is not being sought, but rather a test of how much the West is prepared to endure.

Europe faces humiliation

The European Union has formally supported any dialogue that could contribute to peace, but there is reticence in Brussels.

If Putin does indeed **arrive** in the capital of an EU member state without this being treated as a violation of the shared sanctions policy, the Union will find itself in the position of a powerless observer.

Germany and Poland are already demanding an explanation, while the European Commission says it "does not know about Hungary's plans".

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This moment tests not only the political unity of Europe but also its legal foundations. Putin is subject to an International Criminal Court arrest warrant, and Hungary is a signatory to the Rome Statute.

If Hungary **receives** him without restrictions, the EU can no longer claim consistency in its policy towards Russia.

Orbán understands this very well and uses the opportunity to demonstrate how weak Brussels is without genuine unity, relying on a consensus that is already crumbling from within.

Ukraine as an object of trade

Kyiv is in its most uncomfortable position since the beginning of the war. Its dependence on American support is now becoming a tool of diplomatic blackmail. Trump is attempting to **present** the idea of a "quick peace" as evidence of his own effectiveness, but such a peace would mean freezing the front lines, which have shifted unfavourably for Ukraine.

Zelensky knows that if the summit is held without him, Ukraine will be negotiated over—but without Ukraine itself. That is why he leaves Washington with statements about the "necessity of full trust" and with the awareness that this trust is slipping from his grasp.

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The announced topic of the talks in Budapest is not the cessation of war, but "steps towards de-escalation". In diplomatic terms, this means a pause in the exchange of fire, prisoner exchanges, and agreements on the security of nuclear and energy facilities.

These are technical agreements with no strategic weight, but they provide space for political narratives. Trump can present them as "the first step towards peace", while Putin can claim they prove the West recognises reality. In both cases, Ukraine remains on the sidelines.

Budapest as a mirror of the West

What happens in Budapest will test the political strength and unity of the West. If the European Union allows a meeting on its territory that grants Putin international legitimacy, it will mean its rules and principles have lost significance.

If the United States agrees to the meeting without a clear agreement with its allies, it will signal that the war in Ukraine is no longer a shared struggle but a collection of separate interests.

In this respect, Budapest is not only a meeting place but also a demonstration point that will reveal how much strength the West still has to act in concert.



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alliance but as a group of states, each pursuing its own policy.

Europe is on a slippery slope in this situation. It has no influence over the course of events, and others make decisions regarding its security. Brussels no longer sets the framework but reacts to the moves of Trump, Putin, and Orbán.

If this continues, European diplomacy will lose both power and credibility. It will forfeit what has been its strength for decades—the ability to manage processes rather than merely adapt to them.

Epilogue without peace

The announced summit in Budapest will not bring peace. It will only expose power relations. Putin arrives as a symbol of his return to the stage, Trump as the architect of a new logic of negotiations, and Orbán as a host who believes history will remember his meeting room.

In reality, it all comes down to one question—will the West permit symbolism to become a substitute for strategy?

If Ukraine emerges from this process with weaker support and Europe with less unity, Budapest will not be just another political meeting.

It will be a moment after which the West no longer speaks the same language or shares the same goals. The EU will no longer act as an