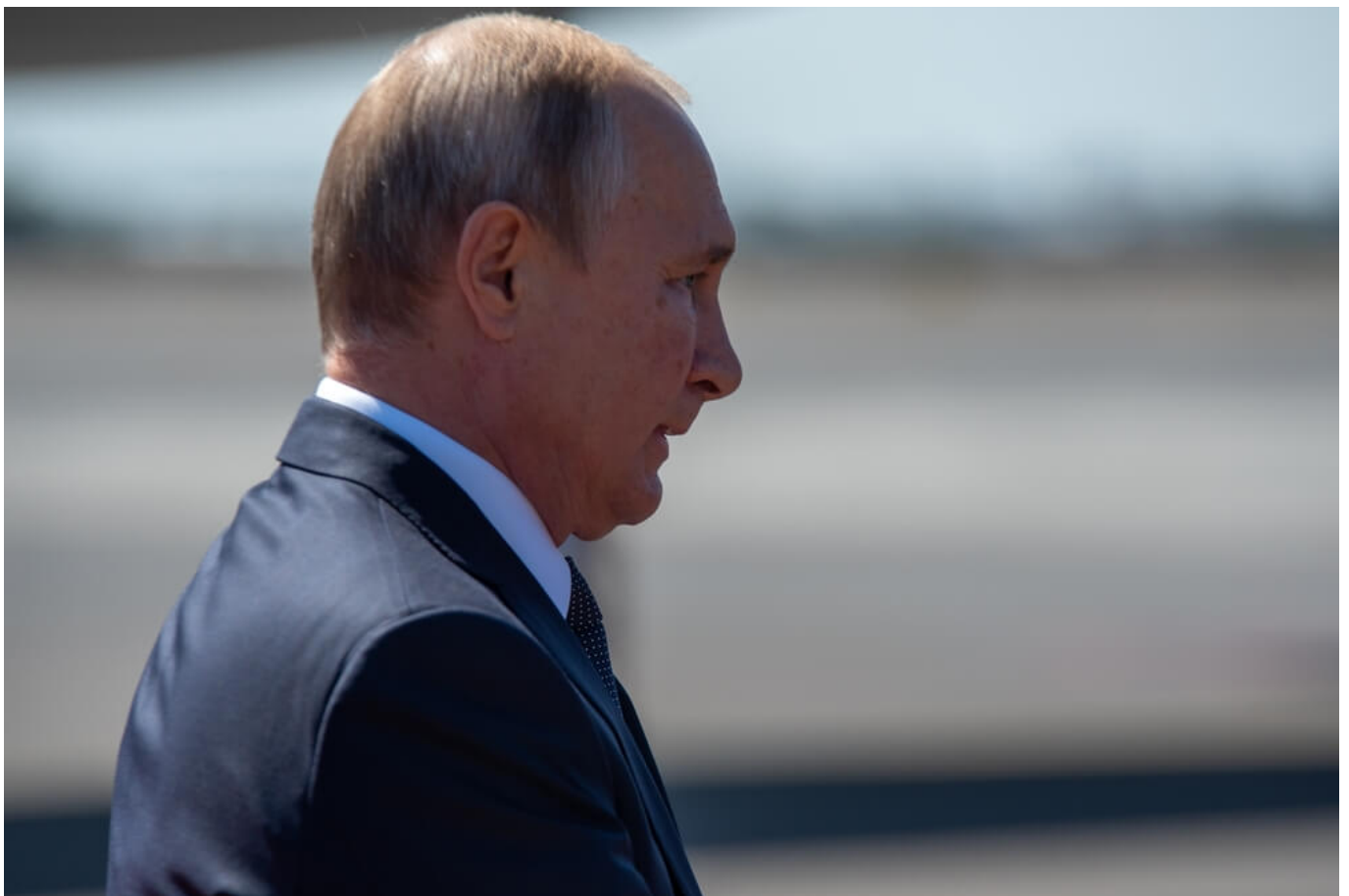




By: *The Editorial Board*

Why can Putin not (or will not) come to Budapest?



A planned **Budapest meeting** between US President Donald Trump and Russian leader Vladimir Putin – ostensibly aimed at finding a solution to the war in Ukraine – is facing serious doubts about whether it will happen at all.

The main reason is simple: **Putin**, who is under an international arrest warrant for war crimes, cannot safely appear in person in Budapest. This apprehension reflects an unusual mix of legal, political, and personal factors.

First, the Russian president is cautious to the point of cowardice – he fears that he could be arrested on foreign soil under the authority of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

In addition, although Hungary has offered him guarantees of **immunity**, questions remain about how credible those guarantees appear to the Kremlin.

Finally, there is the broader issue of intent: does Putin genuinely want peace in Ukraine, or is he merely using the summit's grand announcements to score political points at home?

Fear of arrest under the authority of the ICC

In March 2023, the **International Criminal Court** in The Hague issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin for the war crime of deporting Ukrainian children.

Russia rejected the order as "legally void", but for the 125 signatory states of the Rome Statute, it carries binding force.

If Putin were to enter the territory of any of those countries, the authorities would be obliged to arrest him and extradite him to The Hague.

It is therefore no surprise that, since the order was issued, the Russian president has drastically limited his foreign travel.

He has continued to visit only countries he is confident will not extradite him – primarily those that are not members of the ICC or openly defy the court.

Putin continues to avoid the risk of falling into the custody of a foreign court

In July 2023, Putin cancelled his visit to the **BRICS** summit in South Africa precisely because of this legal threat.

As a signatory to the ICC, the South African authorities were in an unenviable position: they would have been obliged to execute the arrest warrant if Putin appeared.

In the end, Sergei Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, represented Russia in Johannesburg, with Putin participating only via video link.

The same story is repeating two years later. The Kremlin has publicly confirmed that Putin "will not personally participate" in the **G20** summit in South Africa scheduled for November 2025 – another senior representative will attend on his behalf.

Although spokesman Dmitry Peskov did not explain the decision, it is not difficult to link it to the ICC arrest warrant and South Africa's obligations as a member of the Court.

In other words, Putin continues to avoid the risk of falling into the custody of a foreign court – a reminder that behind the image of a confident strongman lies a very real fear of legal accountability.

Hungarian guarantees and the Kremlin's distrust

At least at first glance, Budapest seems an ideal location for such a meeting. Hungary is a member of both NATO and the EU, but unlike other EU member states, it has openly protested against the arrest warrant for Putin.

In 2023, **Orbán's government** announced that "Hungarian laws do not allow the arrest of the Russian president" since the Rome Statute of the ICC is not part of domestic legislation.

Gergely Gulyás, Orbán's chief of staff, stated at the time that Hungary "cannot arrest Putin" and had not yet adopted an official position on the **ICC warrant**.

Hungary remains the only EU member state to have effectively sided with Moscow on this issue, even going so far as to announce its intention to withdraw from ICC membership in protest. Formally or not, Budapest is clearly signalling to the Kremlin that Putin would be safe from arrest on its territory.

However, one question remains: is Putin prepared to trust these guarantees? No matter how sympathetic Orbán may be to Moscow, the arrival of the Russian leader in the heart of Europe carries significant risks.

The journey itself would require a safe flight over the territory of other countries. On his way to Hungary, Putin would have to avoid **Ukrainian airspace** and rely on the goodwill of at least one EU or NATO country for passage.



Although Viktor Orbán may be relying on Trump's political influence to secure an "exception", the Kremlin considers the circumstances far too unpredictable

This would mean that, under pressure from Washington, a European country would have to violate its obligations – both the EU sanctions against Putin and the ICC arrest warrant – by allowing his plane to pass without incident.

For most European governments, such a concession would be politically uncomfortable, if not outright unacceptable.

It is evident that bringing Putin to Budapest would necessitate a range of actors, from neighbouring countries to Brussels, to remain silent and implicitly suspend the legal principles upon which the EU is based.

Although Orbán may be relying on Trump's political influence to secure an "exception", the Kremlin considers the circumstances far too unpredictable. "It is one thing for Putin to be welcome in Budapest and quite another to get him there."

Putin's caution suggests that he does not want to become a hostage to others' promises. Even with Orbán's assurance, the Russian leader remains a prisoner of his own paranoia. He fears that something could go wrong – whether a transit country refuses passage or international circumstances shift.

Putin has spent nearly his entire career within a system that functions only as long as he personally controls it. That is why today he trusts no one – not his collaborators, not his allies, not even the institutions he himself created. He moves only within spaces he can control. This withdrawal is no longer tactical but psychological.

The "bunker strategy" has become his standard behaviour: an avoidance of uncertainty and a fear of anything beyond his control. In this context, diplomacy is no longer an instrument of power but a tool for justifying the avoidance of risk.

Does Putin even want peace?

Even if we imagine, hypothetically, that Putin were to appear in Budapest, a crucial question arises: with what intentions would he come?

All indications suggest that the Russian president is not ready for peace except under conditions that would legitimise the results of his aggression. Recent developments clearly

demonstrate this.

US **President Trump** has proposed a "freeze" of the conflict – an immediate ceasefire along the existing front line, without addressing the final status of the occupied territories.

The initiative has been supported by both Ukrainian and European leaders, who have emphasised that it would represent a first step towards a just peace.

In a joint statement, European officials accused Moscow of obstruction: "Russia is stalling the talks, making it clear that Ukraine is the only party serious about bringing peace. Putin continues to choose violence and destruction."

At the same time, they warned that they would tighten **sanctions** and increase pressure on the Russian economy until Putin demonstrates readiness for genuine peace.

Moscow, however, reacted coldly and implacably. The Kremlin rejected the proposal for an immediate ceasefire, making it clear that it would not accept a "**frozen conflict**" without its maximalist demands being met. Peskov reiterated that "Russia's stance does not change" – meaning that Moscow remains firm on its hard-line terms.

Putin's rhetoric about a "willingness to negotiate" serves only to buy time, consolidate positions, and exhaust the West

These conditions are known to both Kyiv and the West and are entirely unacceptable: Ukraine would have to disarm and surrender part of its territory.

Moreover, according to classified messages sent by Moscow to Washington, Russia is now seeking control over the entire Donbas, not just the part it currently occupies.

Instead of compromise, Putin has raised the stakes – he is demanding even more than he gained in the war. Such an attitude guarantees

that there can be no genuine peace unless Ukraine capitulates, which is unrealistic.

All this suggests that Putin's insincerity and hypocrisy have already compromised the so-called peace initiative in Budapest. The Trump administration has tried to mediate – at times to Ukraine's detriment – to persuade the Kremlin to agree to a ceasefire.

Trump has shifted his approach repeatedly: at one moment threatening Moscow with "harsh sanctions", at another pressuring Kyiv to consider territorial concessions.

However, none of this has changed the reality on the ground – the war continues, and Putin's position remains unchanged.

Those familiar with the situation in the Kremlin know that Putin does not seek an end to the aggression. His rhetoric about a "willingness to **negotiate**" serves only to buy time, consolidate positions, and exhaust the West.

Invitations as a propaganda stage

Why, then, does Putin even entertain the idea of such meetings? If he is not interested in peace, what does he stand to gain? The answer lies in propaganda.

For Putin, invitations to meetings serve primarily as evidence that the world must still respect him. In Russia's domestic politics, where the media are tightly controlled, the image of Putin at the table with the American president carries immense value.

Over the past three years, Moscow has been isolated from the West; Putin had no official contacts with G7 leaders. Every meeting with the American president serves as proof that Russia remains part of the "big game".

Hungary as a meeting place further reinforces the symbolism. The mere presence of Putin in an EU and NATO member state would

undermine Western unity.

For the domestic public in Russia, it would be proof that “Western countries are disunited and eventually have to talk to Putin.”

Alaska summit was announced as an attempt to open a dialogue but ended without any result

The Kremlin would exploit such an event in the media: television broadcasts would replay the handshake between Putin and Trump for days, accompanied by an analysis on how “even America cannot do without Putin.” In an authoritarian system, images often matter more than reality.

We have seen such a scenario before. In mid-August 2025, a surprise meeting between Putin and Trump took place in [Alaska](#).

That summit was announced as an attempt to open a dialogue but ended without any result, which we, as one of the few media outlets, predicted at the time.

Since then, analysts have deemed the meeting pointless – except as an opportunity for Putin to show that he still matters. The war continued, but images of the handshake were presented in Russia as a diplomatic victory. Putin told citizens, “America still needs to talk to me.” In reality, the encounter yielded nothing but photographs – but in propaganda, that is more than enough.

A farce that undermines justice and peace

The entire episode surrounding the possible summit in Budapest appears to be a farce – one that damages both international law and prospects for peace.

The mere consideration of allowing an accused war criminal to set foot on EU soil undermines the principles of justice.



Washington is effectively rewarding Orbán with this summit, even though he has undermined European unity in support of Ukraine for years

The European Union has imposed sanctions on Putin for aggression, and all its member states are required to comply with ICC arrest warrants. Hungary’s exclusion highlights a deep rift in European solidarity.

Orbán’s willingness to host Putin is the culmination of his long-standing pro-Russian policy, which frustrates Brussels.

Washington is effectively rewarding Orbán with this summit, even though he has undermined European unity in support of [Ukraine](#) for years. This strengthens his position domestically and encourages nationalist movements across the continent.

Furthermore, the entire diplomatic drama surrounding this meeting was doomed to failure from the outset. European leaders, aware of Putin’s manoeuvres, responded with caution.

The [European Commission](#) has formally welcomed “any meeting that leads to a just peace”, but behind this politeness lies scepticism.

The chances that the summit in Budapest will achieve more than the one in Alaska are considered minimal. Moscow, refusing even the slightest compromise, blocked the initiative itself and led Trump to “put it on pause”. Although not formally cancelled, the meeting is unlikely to take place soon.

Putin will most likely never set foot in

Budapest with the threat of arrest hanging over him. His regime will continue to blame the failure of negotiations on Ukraine and the West, claiming that they "were not ready to respect Russian interests."

However, it is clear that the real obstacle to peace is Putin himself. He cannot travel because he risks arrest, and he refuses to accept any solution other than one that legitimises aggression.

Such a stance leads to a dead end. Budapest, as a symbolic stage for peace, remains empty. For peace to become reality, a photograph is not enough; the will to end the war is required. And that will is absent.

The conclusion is clear: Vladimir Putin will not dare to come to Budapest – not only because a potential arrest warrant awaits him there, but also because none of his actions demonstrate readiness for genuine peace.

As things stand, any announced summit with him would be merely a show, not a historic breakthrough. The Budapest meeting, even if it appeared to be a step towards peace, was from the outset a propaganda ploy and a political charade, not a sincere effort to end the war. That is precisely why, at least for now, it will not take place.