



By: TA | AP Brief

# EU agrees to launch membership talks with Ukraine



European Union nations agreed to open **membership talks** with Ukraine next week, officially launching the process for the war-torn country to eventually join the world's biggest trading bloc.

At a meeting in Brussels, ambassadors from the 27 EU nations decided to officially open negotiations with Ukraine as well as with **Moldova**, which Russia has also tried to drag back into its orbit, on Monday in Luxembourg.

Ukraine sees EU membership as an important "security guarantee" for a stable future once war with Russia ends.

Its best guarantee would be **NATO membership**, but the Trump administration insists that cannot happen. Others oppose it joining while fighting continues.

Russia is strongly against it, and has cited moves toward NATO membership as a reason for launching its full-scale invasion in 2022, though it has not objected to EU membership for Kyiv.

Countries hoping to join the EU must complete negotiations in 35 policy areas, or chapters, ranging from agriculture to trade, a process which can take years.

An intergovernmental conference will be held on Monday to open key chapters – grouped together as "clusters" – concerning the values and principles on which the bloc was founded.

"This is a recognition of the determination, courage and hard work shown by both countries in advancing reforms, even in the face of immense challenges," EU Council President António Costa and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in a statement.

They described the move as "a strategic choice" that strengthens "peace, security and prosperity across our continent." It's also a "signal that the EU's offer of peace, stability and opportunity is unmatched," they said.

## Deep concerns about corruption

Ukraine officially applied for EU accession less than a week after Russia invaded in February 2022.

The EU commission has praised the country for reforms it has been able to push through in wartime, although deep concerns about **corruption** and justice standards remain.

Last month, German Chancellor **Friedrich Merz** urged his EU partners to consider offering "associate membership" to Ukraine and breathe new life into talks aimed at ending more than four years of war with Russia.

Other countries – France and the Netherlands among them – have suggested work arounds to bring Ukraine into the fold more quickly but without the rights of full membership.

It all comes as the EU weighs whether to try to launch its own negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin, with U.S. mediated talks bogged down while America's attention focuses on the Iran war.

Under Merz's proposals, Ukraine would take part in EU meetings, but without voting rights, and would also have non-voting "associate members" of the bloc's powerful executive branch, the European Commission, and the European Parliament.

All 27 EU members must agree before each policy chapter can be opened, and then again for it to be closed. **Hungary**, notably, has blocked the opening of negotiations, but the arrival of a new government in Budapest has softened that stance.