



By: TA | AP Insight

# EU leaders squabble over outreach to Moscow



European Union leaders have been unable to agree on setting up a **back-channel with Moscow** to ensure that the bloc's interests are protected should progress be made in negotiations to end Russia's war on Ukraine, some of them said on Friday.

European Council President António Costa, who chaired their two-day summit in Brussels this week, had directed his office to reach out to the Kremlin and proposed a senior official to make contact.

Costa said his aim was not to mediate or set up a parallel negotiating track to the one led by the United States, which is making **little progress**.

"We needed to immediately establish this direct contact," Costa said, clarifying that Brussels would not seek to mediate in negotiations but rather open communications.

"We cannot depend only on others to interpret Russian messages and we must be able to convey directly to Russia our own messages," he added.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said she supported Costa's approach because "our entire continent is at risk, and this is why Europe must be one of the architects of a just and lasting peace."

## An unresolved disagreement over diplomacy

Debate has been swirling around Europe in recent months about whether to appoint a mediator for talks with Russia to help get things moving again, but this has been largely rejected as many believe that Russian President Vladimir Putin would be unlikely to negotiate anyway.

Instead, the 27 EU countries have focused on **concessions** that Russia should make to secure peace.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz stressed

that peace negotiations must ultimately be conducted by Ukraine, Russia, Europe and the U.S.

"Who speaks for the European Union is something we don't need to decide on today," he said. "We will decide on that when talks come about."

He added that Costa has "an important role to play" as president of the European Council, representing the EU, preparing and organizing summits, and "we don't need to make decisions going beyond that at the moment."

## Europeans are not mediators - Emmanuel Macron

Merz highlighted efforts to coordinate diplomacy by the so-called **E3 group of countries** — Germany, France and Britain — a format that he said came about "at the explicit wish of Ukraine."

French President Emmanuel Macron said "Europeans are not mediators" in the negotiations but that "Costa, when the competencies are defined, will have a place."

Margus Tsahkna, foreign minister of Estonia — a nation on the EU's eastern flank that has faced drone incursions and was once occupied by the Soviet Union — said that "Europe must not assume the role of a neutral mediator" but instead buttress Ukraine's position to "force the Kremlin into serious negotiations."

## Some nations support Costa's backchannel proposal

As European leaders left overnight after the summit wrapped up, Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever joked that Costa would be the envoy to Moscow.

"I was just talking about you, António," De Wever said while laughing and shaking Costa's hand. "I was full of praise, saying you are the only one who can represent us and that we

will send you to Moscow.”

**Europe is unable to agree even on whether there will be negotiations or who will lead them - Andrej Babiš**

Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin said that “opening up a channel is not a mistake in our view, and I trust António Costa.”

“What was very clear last evening is that any negotiations would have to be first and foremost between Ukraine and Russia, but there are no indications that Russia is coming to the table at all,” he said.

Speaking to reporters, Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš said the leaders had failed at the summit to resolve their differences over the approach overnight. “Europe is unable to agree even on whether there will be negotiations or who will lead them,” he said.

## Russia responds publicly to the overture

Putin has tried to cut out Europe and Kyiv from negotiations with the U.S. over Ukraine’s future.



*The EU can not be an impartial peace broker - Sergey Lavrov*

But the Kremlin said on Friday it was “ready for contact” with Europe, on the condition it abandon its desire to talk to Moscow from the

position of force.

At the same time, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov argued that the EU can not be an impartial peace broker.

He again rejected Western claims that Moscow was harboring plans to attack Europe as “provocation” and “nonsense” while warning that Europe’s military buildup poses growing security threats.

“A direct confrontation between NATO and Russia could rapidly escalate into an exchange of nuclear strikes, with catastrophic consequences,” Lavrov said in an essay released by the Russian Foreign Ministry.