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Extraordinary Meeting of European Leaders with U.S. President Donald Trump Prior to the Russia–United States Summit in Alaska

The announcement of a meeting between the US and Russian presidents in Alaska led to a further increase in diplomatic activity among European political leaders. The series of talks with Donald Trump on 13 August 2025, organised by the German Chancellor, provided an opportunity to present the position of the so-called European Big Five and Finland on the war in Ukraine and in the context of potential peace negotiations. Nevertheless, the meeting demonstrated that the European allies' capacity for influence remains constrained, thereby underscoring the United States' predominant role in shaping transatlantic policy towards Ukraine and Russia.

Course of the meeting. On 13 August 2025, a remote extraordinary meeting of European leaders with US President Donald Trump was convened. The event was organised by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who was accompanied in Berlin by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. On that particular day, three meetings were held. The first meeting was attended by representatives of the European Big Five¹, who, with the participation of Finland, had recently developed a common position on the meeting between the US and Russian presidents in Alaska, scheduled for 15 August. In the second session, the aforementioned position was presented to Donald Trump, who was meeting with representatives of the European Big Five², the President of Ukraine, the President of Finland, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of NATO. The third meeting was attended by representatives of over 30 countries and organisations representing the so-called coalition of the willing.

The international context of the meeting. The heightened diplomatic engagement exhibited by European NATO leaders, analogous to that observed in February 2025 (see [IEŚ Commentary 1297](#)), was precipitated by Donald Trump's proposal to hold a summit with Vladimir Putin in Alaska. In response to the actions of the US president's administration, EU foreign ministers held an informal online conference on 11 August³, and representatives of the Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) issued a joint statement the day before, mainly concerning US efforts to end the war in Ukraine⁴. Concurrently, in the context of working groups, representatives of the so-called European Big Five developed a common position, as previously referenced. A qualitative change that has been observed for some time in the context of all such summits and declarations by their participants is the clearly less offensive rhetoric of European leaders towards President Trump, and even their declared appreciation of his efforts to promote peace.

It is evident that both Poland and Finland were natural representatives of their respective regions at the meeting on 13 August this year. The former represented the 'eastern flank', while the latter represented the Nordic-Baltic region. However, it is noteworthy that, in contrast to the NB8 countries in the eastern flank region, no multilateral consultations were organised and no joint statement was issued on the matter. Evidently, an identical pattern was discernible prior to the February Summit in Paris (see [IEŚ Commentary 1297](#)).

¹ The Chancellor of Germany, the President of France, and the Prime Ministers of Poland, Italy, and the United Kingdom.

² At the request of the United States, the Prime Minister of Poland was replaced by the President of the Republic of Poland, Karol Nawrocki.

³ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2025/08/11/>

⁴ <https://www.government.se/statements/2025/08/joint-statement-of-leaders-of-the-nordic-baltic-eight-on-ukraine/>

The objectives and outcomes of the meeting. The primary objective of the participants of the Berlin summit was to gain insight into the US position in advance of forthcoming talks with Russia. The Trump administration's strategy of information chaos has long made it difficult for European leaders to correctly interpret the real intentions of the US. According to Friedrich Merz's statement at the post-meeting press conference, the summit also sought to present the EU's position on the war, its policy of supporting Ukraine, and the negotiations with Russia themselves, as well as to outline the actions that the coalition of the willing and the EU intend to take in the event of a failure of the ceasefire talks⁵. It is reasonable to hypothesise that European leaders also sought to exert their influence over Trump's policy towards Russia in advance of the scheduled talks. Friedrich Merz revealed that the position of European leaders on negotiations with Russia is based on five main assumptions/demands: 1) Ukraine's involvement in the negotiations is imperative; 2) the establishment of a comprehensive ceasefire is a prerequisite for the commencement of negotiations; 3) the prerogative to decide on any potential territorial concessions lies exclusively with Ukraine; 4) it is essential to ensure that Ukraine is provided with security guarantees in the future; 5) the development of a joint transatlantic strategy to deter Russia is crucial. Nevertheless, it remains challenging to ascertain whether these principles transcend mere rhetoric. In response to a query regarding security guarantees posed by a member of the press during the conference, Friedrich Merz, while affirming the imperative for the Ukrainian armed forces to receive adequate support for self-defence, was unable to provide a definitive response regarding the nature of these guarantees. He ultimately conceded that the specifics of these guarantees had not been the subject of extensive deliberation. This pattern of behaviour gives the impression that European leaders are entering into talks with the US president's administration without having formulated any concrete proposals or bargaining chips. During the course of the meeting, President Trump purportedly confirmed his position that no territorial concessions could be made without the consent of Ukraine⁶. As a result of the meetings, Germany has announced its intention to finance an additional package of US arms deliveries to Ukraine, with a budget of 500 million EUR allocated for this purpose. This initiative represents the third major financing initiative to be announced, following contributions previously committed by the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

Ukraine's position. In the course of the aforementioned press conference, President Zelensky reiterated his stance on the proposal for territorial exchange, as put forward by Donald Trump. He invoked the constitution and the "will of the Ukrainian people" as two pivotal factors, or rather limiting factors, in this regard. However, the timing of the summit was particularly challenging for Ukraine, as Russian armed forces successfully breached Ukrainian defences in the area north of Pokrovsk⁷. In his report, President Zelensky also stated that Russia was preparing an offensive in the Zaporizhzhia, Pokrovsk, and Novopavlivka directions, where it had amassed an additional 30,000 troops⁸. It is evident that President Zelensky is seeking the intercession and mediation of European countries, which, in their relations with the US, act as Ukraine's advocates. This is most likely attributable to concerns regarding potential pressure from the Trump administration. In light of the incident that transpired during the meeting between Trump and Zelensky on 28 February of this year, it is conceivable that the Ukrainian president may have legitimate concerns regarding potential negotiations between Ukraine, Russia, and the US. The summit culminated in the provision of assurances that, in the immediate aftermath of the Alaska talks, US representatives would apprise Ukraine of their progress. The meeting in Berlin is also indicative of Germany's growing importance for Ukraine, both in terms of material (including military) and diplomatic support.

⁵ Once again, there was a threat of the imposition of further sanctions against the Russian Federation.

⁶ However, this does not mean that Ukraine cannot be forced/persuaded to do so in the future.

⁷ More at: <https://www.understandingwar.org/background/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-12-2025>

⁸ <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/1095459.html>