

## UKRAINE

# Trump's slap in Zelensky's face also felt in Europe

WORLD

04\_03\_2025



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The London summit, which brought together many European nations as well as NATO, the EU and the Ukrainian president to discuss how to manage the situation following last Friday's quarrel in the Oval Office between Volodymyr Zelensky and Donald Trump, has launched initiatives that appear confused and already out of breath.

**Apart from the now customary commitment** by Europeans to spend more on

defence and to be prepared to "take on more responsibility", as British Prime Minister Keir Starmer put it, the main points emerging from the London summit seem to celebrate divisions between allies rather than unity of purpose.

Starmer outlined the points of the British plan 'aimed at ending the fighting' in Ukraine, specifying that this plan would be discussed with the US and implemented 'together' with Washington. The leaders present at the summit agreed on four points.

**The first is to maintain military aid to Ukraine** during the war and to increase economic pressure on Russia: sanctions against Moscow will therefore be tightened, while the United States is openly talking about restoring trade relations with Putin. Moreover, it is well known that Europe no longer has any military aid to offer Kiev, while the United States could block all supplies after the dispute with Zelensky in the White House.

**The second point is that a peace agreement** must guarantee the sovereignty and security of Ukraine, which must take part in the negotiations. This point needs clarification, as Ukraine's sovereignty has never been questioned, but it is certain that Moscow will impose territorial concessions on Kiev in the negotiations. Moreover, as Trump has repeatedly pointed out, Ukraine is not in a position to dictate terms.

**Starmer argued that 'of course'** an agreement will have to include Moscow, but Russia 'cannot dictate the terms of the peace deal'. But it is clear that the terms will be dictated by those who win the war, not those who lose it, as Trump once again brutally told Zelensky.

**The third point states that European leaders will try** to prevent any future invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and the final point establishes a 'coalition of the willing' to defend Kiev and guarantee peace in the country. This means that the Europeans will be the ones offering military guarantees (and therefore rather weak ones) and promising to send their armies to the rescue of the Ukrainians in the event of a new invasion. This is an aspect about which there are legitimate doubts, as very few nations seem willing to take such risks.

**Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk has admitted** that there is no 'unity' in the West on the seizure and use of Russian assets because some countries 'fear the consequences for the euro or the banking system': it is hard to believe that anyone is prepared to send European troops into Ukraine.

**It is no coincidence that Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni** has downplayed

the plan presented by Britain and France, limiting herself to saying that "there are some ideas, different proposals, I think anyone who puts a proposal on the table is doing something useful at the moment. Then there may be concerns about some proposals", such as "the use of European troops, about which I have expressed concerns", reiterating that "the presence of Italian troops in Ukraine has never been on the agenda".

**The Meloni then added that "it is a mistake** to take the debate on the Atlantic framework off the table", with a clear reference to the coalition announced by the British Prime Minister, who seems to have forgotten that one of the conditions set by Moscow for negotiations is that there should be no NATO troops (and therefore no EU troops or different coalitions of the same nations) on Ukrainian territory.

Starmer asserted that 'a number of countries' had already offered their availability for the plan 'we are developing', but he gave no details, although he reiterated that this coalition would be open to non-European countries.

**The four points he listed are therefore very uncertain,** except for the point where he entrusts the defence of Ukraine to a 'coalition of the willing', that is to say an agreement between nations that are willing to commit themselves in this sense: a term that sounds like a death knell for NATO and the EU, even if the President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has said that she hopes that the Europeans will work to 'turn Ukraine into a steel porcupine, indigestible for potential invaders', a term already used in recent days by the former British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson.

**The British Prime Minister made it clear** that Europe will have to do the 'heavy lifting' but will need the support of the US, adding that he 'agrees with Trump on the urgent need for a lasting peace. Now we must achieve it together. The British Prime Minister also said that he did not accept that the US could be considered an 'unreliable' ally, confirming that the Europeans, now as in the past, were not in a position to distance themselves from Washington.

**Zelensky's adviser, Mikhaïlo Podolyak,** then gave an interview in which he outlined the security guarantees Kiev wants in order to negotiate an end to the conflict, including broad assurances of Western intervention alongside the Ukrainians in the event of a new war, the supply of long-range weapons aimed at Russia and the strengthening of the Ukrainian war industry. These aspects were excluded from the outset by Moscow, which demands that Kiev disarm, at least as far as offensive weapons are concerned. In fact, what Podolyak said seems to be in line with Trump, who accused Zelensky of not wanting peace. This means that the war will continue, or that the Ukrainian president

could be induced to resign and be removed.

**The fact that Podolyak has ruled out the president's resignation** indicates that this is not a remote possibility, especially considering that the United States has the powerful weapon of military aid to heavily influence the government and also the parliament in Kiev, where there is talk of challenging Zelensky after his disastrous visit to Washington in recent days, for which the Ukrainian president was clearly unprepared.

**Certain conversations should not be held in front of the media**, with all due respect to democracy,' Zelensky said in an interview with Fox News. Nobody wants peace more than we do, but a ceasefire without security guarantees from the United States is a very sensitive issue for my people.

**There is no doubt that the row in the Oval Office** was caused by the fact that the US does not want to offer Ukraine any security guarantees or risk being drawn into a conflict with Russia, but the dynamics of the argument revealed a serious lack of professionalism in the way the meeting was conducted, unexpected in high-level meetings between heads of state where diatribes are often very heated but kept out of the media spotlight.

The summits include an initial 'photo opportunity' of a few minutes, during which journalists exchange a few words with the leaders, take photographs and video footage. This is followed by closed-door talks between the leaders, which can be as tough as the one we saw on Friday, but no one loses face because they take place away from the media and the public.

**At the end of the talks**, the communications people decide what to say together and what language to use to define the issues on the agenda, especially if there are differences of opinion. Only after these aspects have been defined do the two leaders appear at the joint press conference, equipped with all the necessary tools to avoid sharp contrasts in public.

**On Friday, however, the "photo opportunity" was turned** into a media debate and press conference: a gross technical error that led to a surprising disaster in a context such as that of the White House, unless it was an ambush aimed at discrediting Zelensky, cornering and ridiculing him, showing him as a bully who always demands more weapons and money from the United States.

**Demands that the "new sheriff"** (as Vice President JD Vance called Trump) would refuse to protect the interests of the United States and American taxpayers. If this

hypothesis is confirmed, the mission has been accomplished, in an urban and brutal but successful way. It is no coincidence that shortly after the Ukrainian delegation was expelled from the White House, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, who has always been a great supporter of Zelensky, called for his resignation.

**Trump has thus spread panic in Kiev** and plunged Europe into chaos. The only thing that is certain is that many people in Moscow have raised a toast.