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Why Europe's Russia Diplomacy is Gathering Pace Without Getting Closer to Peace



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Russia's Foreign Ministry has [revealed](#) details of a meeting this week between Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin and the ambassadors of United Kingdom, France, and Germany.

According to Moscow, Russian officials used the meeting to explain the Kremlin's "principled approaches" to ending the war in Ukraine. The Russian side also [criticized](#) continued European military assistance to Kyiv, describing it as a "destructive" policy that undermines prospects for a settlement.

The exchange is notable because it comes as Europe increasingly prepares for eventual negotiations with Russia over Ukraine. The [joint statement](#) of the UK, France and Germany following their recent meeting in London on the Ukraine war points in that direction.

The statements emerging from the Moscow meeting suggest that both sides are already engaged in a struggle over the future negotiating agenda. Europe continues to insist on conditions that Russia rejects. Russia continues to demand concessions that Europe and Ukraine reject.

At the same time, Europe is still [debating](#) who should represent it and what exactly its common negotiating position should be. That uncertainty strengthens Moscow's [argument](#) that it is dealing not with a unified counterpart, but with multiple European actors pursuing overlapping but not identical objectives.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni recently [reinforced](#) the point that Europe needs a single representative at the negotiating table. Once European governments agree on the ultimate objective of negotiations, she said, they should appoint someone capable of speaking for European interests as a whole. Acting through shifting and only partially representative formats risks producing fragmentation, confusion, and weakness.

Her comments highlight a problem that has become increasingly visible. While various coalitions of European leaders have met to discuss Ukraine, none of the existing formats possesses an

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uncontested mandate to negotiate on behalf of all European states. Before Europeans can bargain with Moscow, they may first have to reach agreement among themselves.

As for the future negotiating agenda, the problem is that the frameworks currently being discussed by Europe and Russia remain far apart.

Recent proposals emerging from discussions between Volodymyr Zelensky, Friedrich Merz, Emmanuel Macron, and Sir Keir Starmer [have centered](#) on a ceasefire along the current front line, followed by negotiations over a broader settlement. At the same time, however, those proposals have included the [prospect of foreign military deployments](#) in Ukraine after a ceasefire—an issue that Moscow has consistently described as unacceptable.

This creates an obvious contradiction. If the goal is to maximize the chances of securing a ceasefire, it makes little sense to publicly emphasize conditions that Russia has repeatedly rejected. If, on the other hand, the objective is to demonstrate diplomatic flexibility while ensuring that negotiations go nowhere, such conditions become easier to understand.

To be clear, Moscow itself remains far from accepting a freeze along the current line of contact. Russian officials continue to insist that any settlement must address what they describe as the territorial realities created by the war. There is no indication that the Kremlin has abandoned those demands.

That said, the inclusion of highly contentious provisions raises the possibility that some European governments are hedging against the risk that Russia could unexpectedly show interest in a ceasefire. If that were to happen, Kyiv would face growing pressure to engage. Additional conditions provide a mechanism for preventing negotiations from advancing too far, too quickly.

The debate over foreign troop deployments is relevant. In practical terms, the chances of European forces entering Ukraine without a comprehensive peace settlement remain extremely low. Any such deployment would carry the risk of being drawn into renewed hostilities if the ceasefire collapsed. That would place European soldiers in direct confrontation with a nuclear-armed Russia—a scenario that both Europe and the United States have spent years trying to avoid.

That desire to avoid direct confrontation has been visible far beyond the negotiating track. It can be seen in the growing number of drone incidents involving NATO territory. Russian drones [have entered](#) Romanian airspace during attacks on targets in Ukraine. Drones linked to the war have also appeared over or crashed in the [Baltic states](#). In each case, European governments [treated the incidents](#) as serious security concerns while carefully avoiding steps that could turn them into a wider military crisis.

This is significant because it reveals the gap between rhetoric and strategy. If European leaders genuinely believed that a direct confrontation with Russia was either desirable or unavoidable, repeated drone incursions into NATO territory would have provided an obvious justification for a much tougher, escalatory response. Instead, policymakers consistently searched for explanations that kept such incidents below the threshold of a direct NATO – Russia conflict.

The reason is straightforward. Whatever disagreements exist within Europe over Ukraine, there remains broad consensus on one point: a direct war between NATO and Russia would carry

unacceptable risks. The prospect of [nuclear escalation](#) continues to shape decision-making on both sides.

This is why discussions of peacekeepers often appear disconnected from strategic reality. Without Russian consent, a robust settlement, and credible guarantees that hostilities will not immediately resume, the political appetite in Europe for such a deployment appears limited.

Indeed, if policymakers genuinely believed that foreign troops would eventually be necessary, there would be a strong argument for avoiding public discussion of the issue before a ceasefire is reached. Advertising plans that Moscow opposes is unlikely to make Russian acceptance more probable.

A key question is whether either side is genuinely trying to identify terms the other might accept. Until that happens, meetings between diplomats may generate headlines and talking points, but they are unlikely to bring a negotiated settlement significantly closer. And diplomacy may be becoming more active without becoming more productive.

For now, the most revealing aspect of Europe's approach may not be the ambitious peace plans being discussed in public, but the caution visible in practice. Whether in the handling of drone incidents over Romania and the Baltics or in the reluctance to place troops directly in Ukraine, European governments continue to behave as if avoiding a Russia-NATO war remains their highest strategic priority.

And as long as that remains true, diplomacy—however difficult and fragmented—will remain preferable to escalation.

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