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*Ricardo Martins*

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## ***A Trump-Putin Deal Over Ukraine Does Not Look Good for Europe***

“Stop pushing Zelensky into peace talks”, tells EU Foreign Affairs chief to European leaders. For the EU, a negotiated peace deal is a win for Putin and a defeat for Europe. Understand the reasons.



**Europe has invested too much to settle for ‘just’ a peace deal: the goal was to crush Russia**

The total amount of military aid to Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict in February 2022 amounts to \$119 billion, including 62 billion from the U.S., as confirmed by Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin. The amount allocated under the humanitarian label is more than double. Europe has channelled significant resources into Ukraine, from financial aid packages, to military equipment, and training programmes. Great Britain, along with the U.S., has been crucial in intelligence support too. Beyond this, Europe has also invested heavily in influencing public opinion with narratives such as “Putin will invade Europe next.” The scale

of these war-supporting efforts has been so extensive that **many European countries have depleted both their arms stockpiles and public finances.**

Europe risks losing credibility both within its borders and on the global stage

Annalena Baerbock, Germany's Foreign Minister, has underscored the financial burden of ongoing support for Ukraine, revealing that the €37 billion allocated has necessitated cuts to social spending programs within Germany. The consequences of this financial obligation are staggering, according to the minister: crucial investments in early childhood programs and infrastructure modernization have been sidelined in favour of military assistance to Ukraine.

These efforts were designed to position Europe as a steady ally of Ukraine, committed to defending democratic values and regional stability. However, the looming possibility of an eventual Trump-Putin deal leaves Europe in a precarious position, grappling with the absence of a clear, face-saving strategy.

Therefore, the EU foreign affairs chief, Kaja Kallas, downplayed discussions about peace during her first meeting with EU foreign affairs ministers in Brussels, disregarding a Gallup poll showing that a majority of Ukrainians (52%) favour peace negotiations, while 38% support continuing the fighting. Kallas went further, admonishing EU heads of state at the latest EU summit: "Stop pushing Zelensky into peace talks."

The most striking aspect of this statement is that it comes from someone holding the title of EU diplomacy chief—a role traditionally centred on fostering dialogue and negotiation. Yet, this very individual appears to dismiss the importance of diplomacy, even as Putin has repeatedly expressed willingness to engage in negotiations.

Previously, when Hungary assumed the presidency of the Council of Europe in July 2024, its president Viktor Orbán embarked on a peace mission to Kyiv and Moscow. Instead of receiving support, Orbán faced sharp criticism, threats of having Hungary's presidency sidelined, and even the sabotage of activities organized under its leadership. Such hostility underscores the entrenched resistance in Europe towards any peace deal regarding the conflict.

### **Fear of Geopolitical Insignificance?**

European Union leaders have voiced growing concerns over the potential ramifications of U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's proposed approach to resolving the war in Ukraine. Trump's promise to prioritize a quick resolution to the conflict has sparked fears in Brussels that such a deal, likely negotiated directly with Moscow, could come at a steep cost for Ukraine and the security architecture of the European continent.

Such a deal could drastically shift the geopolitical landscape, potentially sidelining Europe in critical negotiations or undermining its investments and sacrifices. Europe's commitment has been framed as a moral and strategic stand against aggression, but if Washington pivots toward reconciliation with Moscow, Europe could appear overextended and politically sidelined in its own European matters.

This situation is particularly uncomfortable given the EU's reliance on the U.S. for broader security assurances. Zelensky understood it and bluntly stated: "Security guarantees without the US are not sufficient for Ukraine."

Without a cohesive plan to address the fallout of a potential agreement between Trump and Putin, Europe risks losing credibility both within its borders and on the global stage.

### **Framing the Conflict as Putin's Personal War: Simplistic Narratives Are More Convincing**

The mantra "Russia must not win" has become a rallying cry across the EU, where any agreement is framed as a "victory for Putin." This narrative conveniently reduces the war to a personal crusade by Vladimir Putin, dismissing the broader strategic and national interests driving Moscow's actions. By personalizing the conflict, it becomes easier to frame it as a clear-cut battle of good versus evil, a narrative that is eagerly amplified by the media and political analysts. This portrayal has effectively stoked public fears with claims that "Europe is in danger," galvanizing support for continued military engagement.

However, not everyone has embraced this oversimplified dichotomy. Independent analysts and critical observers have pushed back, pointing out the dangers of ignoring the complex geopolitical realities at play. They argue that viewing the conflict through a lens of rational strategic interests, rather than moral absolutism, could open avenues for meaningful dialogue and resolution—options currently sidelined in favour of escalation.

This refusal to consider alternative perspectives risks prolonging the conflict, leaving Europe increasingly strained by the economic and political costs of its unwavering commitment to a military solution. Meanwhile, voices calling for pragmatism and peace remain drowned out by the cacophony of war rhetoric.

In sum, Europe must urgently rethink its approach, prioritizing diplomatic agility and long-term strategies that enable it to assert its own influence, regardless of U.S. policy fluctuations. Meanwhile, Trump's claim that he could end the war in 24 hours appears increasingly unrealistic. The so-called 'Deep State'—comprising the informational, intelligence, and military apparatus—seems to have its own agenda, potentially signalling to Trump where the

true power lies. Moreover, despite the immense human, infrastructural, and societal losses in Ukraine, the war remains highly profitable for certain entities.

Ricardo Martins, December 30, 2024

***Ricardo Martins –PhD in Sociology, specializing in policies, European and world politics and geopolitics***