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Ukraine – European Union

- *THEME ANALYSIS: The 18th package of sanctions against Russia as a signal of the EU's intention to build its own system to counter Russian military expansion*



Photo: AP

European Union ambassadors have approved the 18th package of sanctions against Russia. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas called the new package one of the most powerful. She noted that the sanctions further reduce the Kremlin's military spending, target 105 shadow fleet vessels and their facilitators, limit the financial capabilities of Russian banks, and ban the use of the Nord Stream gas pipelines. In addition, the package includes a reduction in the price cap on Russian oil. According to Kallas, pressure on Russia will continue to increase until the aggression is stopped.

Reuters, citing diplomatic sources, reports that the new package plans to lower the G7-imposed price cap on Russian oil to \$47.6 per barrel. The sanctions also include a ban on financial transactions related to the Nord Stream pipelines, even though they are currently not in use. This aims to prevent their potential reactivation in the future. The package also includes new measures against vessels that are part of Russia's "shadow fleet" and help circumvent sanctions.

Slovakia had delayed the adoption of the package for some time due to a dispute over a separate European Commission proposal to completely stop importing Russian gas by 2028. Bratislava argued this could lead to an energy deficit, higher prices, increased transit costs, and even compensation claims from Gazprom. Unlike the gas import proposal, which requires majority support from EU states, sanctions against Russia must be adopted unanimously. Slovakia linked the two issues, demanding that its concerns be addressed. However, Prime

Minister Robert Fico has announced that Slovakia will lift its blockade of the sanctions package.

The European Commission presented the draft of the new sanctions back in June, with the main goal of lowering the oil price cap from \$60 to \$45 per barrel. Since this decision requires coordination with G7 partners, the EU sought agreement with the U.S. at the summit in Canada. The EU Council agreed to add 55 new entities — 14 individuals and 41 organizations — responsible for undermining Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence or threatening them. The total number of entities on the sanctions list now exceeds 2,500.

The European Union is also taking new steps to reduce Russia's revenue from energy exports. The price cap on Russian crude oil has been reduced from \$60 to \$47.6 per barrel to align with market prices. A flexible mechanism for automatic price adjustments has also been introduced to ensure the cap remains effective. Oil currently accounts for about one-third of Russia's budget revenue.

The EU is expanding sanctions to cover the entire value chain of the shadow fleet. Another 105 vessels are now banned from entering European ports and are restricted from receiving a wide range of maritime services. The total number of sanctioned vessels now reaches 444. These are tankers not registered in the EU but affiliated with the shadow fleet, used to evade oil sanctions, deliver weapons to Russia, or transport stolen Ukrainian grain.

The sanctions include a full range of measures — asset freezes, travel bans, export and import bans — targeting both Russian and international companies associated with the shadow fleet. For the first time, the list includes a captain of a shadow fleet vessel and a private entity managing an international flag registry. Among the sanctioned are an oil refinery in India owned by Rosneft and a company involved in the liquefied natural gas (LNG) sector.

Restrictions were also introduced on the import of oil products refined from Russian crude in third countries, except for Canada, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This aims to prevent Russian oil from entering the EU market indirectly. A full ban was imposed on all transactions related to the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines, including the supply of goods and services. The goal is to make their completion, operation, repair, or future activation impossible.

Special exemptions for oil imports to the Czech Republic have been revoked. The ban on the use of financial messaging services by Russian banks has been expanded — a full transaction ban now applies to 22 more banks (45 in total), replacing the previous partial ban on specific services. The threshold for imposing sanctions on financial institutions and crypto providers from third countries has been lowered. These include those helping Russia evade sanctions, support its military actions, or are linked to Russia's SPFS — an alternative to SWIFT created by the Russian central bank. The ban has also been extended to third-country organizations involved in sanction-evasion schemes related to oil trade or war financing.

A separate ban was adopted on any operations involving the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), its companies, and sub-funds. The EU Council has been granted a tool to include in the sanctions list any organization cooperating with RDIF or providing it with investment services. Four such companies have already been added to the list. This further limits Russia's access to global finance and hard currency. A ban has also been imposed on the sale and transfer of banking software or management systems that could be used in the financial sector.

New sanctions have also been introduced against companies supplying goods to the Russian military-industrial complex, including three Chinese firms selling equipment for battlefield use.

Eight Belarusian enterprises supporting Russia's war efforts have also been sanctioned. An additional 26 entities have been added to the list of companies subject to stricter dual-use export restrictions. These include 11 firms from third countries — seven from China and Hong Kong and four from Turkey — involved in procuring components, including for drones.

Additional export restrictions have been imposed on goods worth over €2.5 billion. The list of products that could be used in military production has been expanded, including numerically controlled machine tools and rocket fuel components. The transit of certain infrastructure and transport-related goods through Russia has also been banned.

Sanctions were also imposed on another individual involved in the forced "military education" of Ukrainian children. The total number of individuals involved in deportations and indoctrination now exceeds 90. The list also includes several collaborators in the occupied territories, including one responsible for manipulating Ukrainian cultural heritage, a prominent businessman, and a well-known Russian propagandist. In addition to the eight new sanctions against Belarusian defense enterprises, the package also harmonizes trade restrictions with those applied to Russia. Furthermore, the ban on specialized banking services has been extended to a complete ban on financial transactions. A full embargo on arms imports from Belarus has also been introduced.

The EU has also introduced new mechanisms to protect against arbitrations under Bilateral Investment Treaties initiated by Russian companies, oligarchs, or their representatives. This includes compensation claims that member states are not required to recognize and the obligation to respond jointly under BITs to prevent abuse.

The newly agreed EU sanctions are considered the toughest so far, particularly due to the reduced oil price cap. However, as communications expert Maksym Gardus from the Razom We Stand organization noted in an interview with RFI Ukrainian, the effect of these measures will depend on enforcement and international coordination and *there is still no effective mechanism for monitoring compliance with these restrictions.*

«The West's sanctions policy is unsystematic. Each country creates its own control methods, which are often not coordinated with each other. Therefore, for the price cap to really work, *firstly*, it must be even lower — not \$47, but around \$30–35 per barrel. *Secondly*, violators who sell oil above the set limit must be regularly punished. And so far, there are critically few such targeted sanctions," the expert notes.¹ To him, **it is precisely the enforcement of sanctions that could deal the biggest blow to Russia.** However, the EU has no leverage over countries that resell Russian oil, particularly in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Persian Gulf region. Although the European Union is a key trading partner for most of these countries, *there is no actual instrument that would allow Brussels to exert economic pressure.* At the same time, according to Gardus, the EU itself should offer its member states alternatives to Russian energy sources and invest more actively in renewable energy sources.²

“There are some countries that have done very little to reduce their energy dependence on Russia. This is particularly true of Central Europe. And here, the blame lies largely with their governments. But the European Commission could also have done more to encourage the transition to other energy sources,” the expert emphasizes. As previously noted, Slovakia

¹ ¹ ЄС ухвалив 18-й пакет санкцій проти росії.23.07.2025. <https://eu-ua.kmu.gov.ua/news/yes-uhvalyv-18-j-paket-sanktsij-proti-rosiyi/>

² 18-й пакет санкцій проти РФ — болючий, але недостатньо, — Гардус.19.07.2025. <https://www.rfi.fr/uk/%D0%BC%D1%96%D0%B6%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D1%96-%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8/20250719-18-%D0%B9->

remained the only country that blocked the adoption of the 18th package of sanctions until the very end. Prime Minister Robert Fico stated outright that Bratislava would never agree to a complete ban on Russian gas. However, after lengthy consultations with European structures, Slovakia changed its position, although Fico has already hinted that the next package, the 19th, may be blocked again.

As noted, the 18th package included sanctions against Russia's shadow fleet: 105 ships were subject to restrictions, and restrictions were also imposed on Russian banks' access to financing. And here, according to Gardus, the same problem arises — the lack of a single international coordinating body. "For example, a ship named Medusa-2 flying the Liberian flag may be subject to EU sanctions, but not subject to restrictions in Britain or elsewhere. By the time countries agree on the sanctions status, this ship will have been resold several times, changed its name and flag. And now it is "Sputnik-4," not subject to sanctions in any jurisdiction. Due to this lack of coordination, it is impossible to completely stop violations of oil restrictions," he explains.

Despite everything, even in this form, the sanctions are dealing a significant blow to Russia's economy, albeit not the maximum possible. "These are delays in delivery and the need to give large discounts to buyers. Not everyone wants to deal with 'problematic oil', fearing that they will fall under US sanctions. In addition, such logistics require a multi-level infrastructure — oil passes through 5–10 intermediaries, each of which takes its share. As a result, this eats into the profits that could have gone to the Russian budget. And from there — to the war: defense and the military-industrial complex account for up to a third of the budget. That is, every 30 cents of every dollar received for oil goes to missiles that then fly to Ukraine. Therefore, even the loss of a billion in revenue is already good. But it could have been much more," concludes Maxim Gardus.

At the same time, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce criticized the new EU sanctions, saying that they "seriously damage trade, economic, and financial relations" between the parties. The ministry stressed that Beijing will take measures to "protect the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies and financial organizations." According to reports, the 18th package of EU sanctions against Russia, adopted on July 18, includes restrictions on two Chinese banks and five companies registered in the PRC. This is the first time since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine that financial institutions from China have been included in the EU sanctions list.

The European Council announced that Heihe Rural Commercial Bank Co. and Heilongjiang Suifenhe Rural Commercial Bank Co. were subject to sanctions. According to the EU, both institutions were involved in "conducting transactions or providing export financing" that helped Russia circumvent Western restrictions. Earlier, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said that "normal trade and cooperation between Chinese and Russian companies comply with WTO rules and market principles. They are not directed against third countries and should not be disrupted or restricted."

For its part, Ukraine hopes that the next, 19th package of EU sanctions against Russia will cover new areas — in particular, captains of shadow fleet ships, the Russian defense-industrial complex, and financial schemes to circumvent sanctions. This was stated on the air of the TV channel "We Are Ukraine" by Vladislav Vlasyuk, advisor to the President of Ukraine on sanctions policy, according to European Truth.

"We want the next rounds of sanctions to put more pressure on Russia's oil infrastructure. Right now, about 600 tankers in the shadow fleet are already under sanctions. But it's important

for us to go further — to infrastructure facilities. The 18th package included a large oil refinery in India, and this had an immediate effect. Similarly, one of the captains of the shadow fleet was added to the sanctions list for the first time, and this also had an immediate result," Vlasyuk said. According to him, Ukraine advocates for the inclusion of shadow ship captains, marine terminals, port infrastructure, and, possibly, insurance companies in the next package — all those who directly or indirectly contribute to the activities of the Russian shadow fleet.

"Another priority is the Russian military-industrial complex. We have prepared proposals for new categories of goods and substances to be included in the list of critical components. It is expected that the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine will soon present a separate sanctions package targeting specific segments of the military-industrial complex. We expect our partners to synchronize their actions with these decisions," he said. Also, according to Vlasyuk, Ukraine, together with its Western partners, is working to identify new schemes for circumventing sanctions that Russia is actively using, in particular cryptocurrencies and stablecoins.

Despite certain shortcomings **The 18th package is very ambitious and, most importantly, sets the trend for more decisive steps on the part of the EU.** After years of political moderation and demilitarization, Brussels is struggling to find effective levers of influence that would emphasize its subjectivity. But going beyond Russia's borders and striking at its allies shows that a new era of European politics has begun.

Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine

- *THEME ANALYSIS: 50 days: coercion for peace or carte blanche for Russia's military victory over Ukraine?*



Source: Reuters

US President Donald Trump has issued a clear ultimatum to Russia: Moscow must end the war in Ukraine within 50 days, otherwise the United States will impose severe secondary sanctions. Despite this, Russia has intensified its offensive in the Donetsk, Kharkiv, and Dnipropetrovsk regions. This prompted the US president to declare on July 29 that waiting no longer made sense, and that he was reducing the deadline to 10 days. After this deadline, Russia will face not only secondary tariffs, but also secondary sanctions. In addition, on July 30, Trump announced the introduction of tariffs against India. Among the key reasons, he cited New Delhi's economic ties with Moscow, as well as the purchase of Russian weapons. Trump made it clear that new sanctions could be imposed even before the end of the seven-week deadline. The decision was made amid criticism from analysts and Ukrainian activists, who called the deadline a “window of opportunity” for the Kremlin.

“Putin is trying to seize as much as possible before the deadline,” said Yuriy Boychenko, head of the Hope for Ukraine organization. This refers, in particular, to attempts to occupy certain areas of Sumy, Kharkiv, and Dnipropetrovsk regions. Washington emphasizes that if the requirements are not met by September 2, Russia will face a new round of restrictions, primarily on oil exports to China and India, which will significantly affect the sources of funding for the war.

According to the Institute for the Study of War, Russian forces have likely taken control of Novoeconomichne in Donetsk Oblast and advanced in the Kupiansk area, attempting to encircle Ukrainian positions. Despite the announced military aid from the US, including the transfer of Patriot anti-aircraft missiles, Russia continues to launch massive missile and drone

strikes on Ukrainian cities. Attempts to launch a peace dialogue, in particular the initiative to hold a summit between Zelensky and Putin by the end of August, have so far been unsuccessful. "Putin has been given 50 days to kill. And he will take full advantage of it," Boychenko said. His position is supported by Western experts, who emphasize that only decisive pressure can force the Kremlin to stop its aggression.

The Ukrainian side has proposed a personal meeting between Presidents Volodymyr Zelensky and Vladimir Putin. However, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov expressed doubts about the possibility of such a summit by the end of August, stressing that it should "complete the settlement of the conflict." This indicates that no agreement will be reached by the time Trump's ultimatum expires.

The American Institute for the Study of War (ISW) notes in its report that Russian President Vladimir Putin is unlikely to abandon his military ambitions without serious defeats on the battlefield by the Ukrainian army. Analysts emphasize that the Kremlin continues to position Russia as a state in confrontation with the West in order to strengthen domestic support for the war in Ukraine and prepare society for further confrontation with NATO.³ "The Russian authorities have spent considerable resources on building support for the war among the population," experts note. "The results of both state and independent polls show that the majority of Russian citizens support the war until the Kremlin's declared goals are achieved: the 'denazification', demilitarisation and neutrality of Ukraine. This artificially created determination of Russian society makes it difficult for Putin to present any peace agreement that does not include all these points as a victory."

ISW believes that Putin will not compromise unless forced to do so by Ukrainian military successes, as any peace agreement that does not fully achieve his goals will call into question both the feasibility and effectiveness of the entire military campaign in Ukraine. Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev responded to Trump's words by saying that such statements only bring the US closer to direct war with Russia. "Trump is playing dangerous games with Russia — first 50 days, then 10. He should not forget two things: Russia is not Israel and not Iran. And every new ultimatum is not just pressure, it is a step towards war. Not war with Ukraine, but war with the US," Medvedev wrote on social media.

Republican Senator Marco Rubio added in an interview with Fox News that without support from China, which continues to buy Russian oil, Putin would hardly be able to sustain the war for so long. Trump also announced his intention to sell American weapons to allied countries for further transfer to Ukraine. Several countries, including Germany, have expressed their willingness to join such an initiative.

Russia reacted to these statements with restraint. The Kremlin's official position remained unchanged: **Moscow appears to be interested in peace, but only on terms that Kyiv considers an ultimatum or a form of surrender.** In particular, this refers to the demand to relinquish part of Ukraine's territory — even those areas that are not currently under Russian control or have never been occupied by Russia.

At the end of last week, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio also stressed that President Trump is beginning to lose patience with Russia's position in the context of the war against Ukraine. According to Rubio, the American leader is increasingly less inclined to continue

³ ISW після заяв Трампа: Путін навряд чи піде на поступки без значних перемог України на полі бою. 29.07.2025. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-isw-tramp-putin/33486593.html>

waiting for any real steps from Moscow that could contribute to the cessation of hostilities. ***The 50-day deadline given to Russia by US President Donald Trump to cease hostilities is actually being used to intensify offensive actions by the Russian Federation — the Kremlin expects that pressure from Washington will be minimal during this time.*** The easing of sanctions by the US coincides with Putin's expected visit to China, which further reduces the likelihood of the war ending in September. This opinion was expressed on July 17 on the FREEDOM TV channel by military expert and former SBU employee Ivan Stupak.⁴

He reminded that one should not expect a “magical” end to the war after this period, just as it did not happen after Trump's inauguration. In his opinion, Trump's statement could be related to certain agreements that Putin does not intend to fulfill. “It is possible that Trump offered 50 days for Putin to end his actions and move on to negotiations. But it is clear that Russia will only intensify its offensive,” the expert said. According to Stupak, the markets also reacted to Trump's statement as a signal of calm — the indices on the Moscow Exchange rose, and the price of oil fell. This indicates Moscow's confidence that there are no threats in the near future.

At the same time, attention to sanctions policy is declining in the US: the number of specialists who track violations and seize assets is being reduced, and the political focus is gradually shifting to the domestic election campaign. This opens up new opportunities for Russia, Stupak believes. “In September, there will be no new sanctions or tough pressure. The election season will begin, and Ukraine will no longer receive as much attention,” he stressed.

Against this backdrop, the Kremlin is likely seeking to achieve some success on the front lines before Putin's meeting with Xi Jinping. Although there have been no changes on the front lines, Moscow is still holding on to even minimal gains, which it uses as an argument for continuing the war. According to the analyst, the Kremlin may only seriously consider negotiations when the front lines come to a complete standstill and there is no possibility of either advancing or retreating. Until then, there is no reason for de-escalation on the Russian side, especially since a radical domestic audience is also pushing for the war to continue.

Kremlin officials are pressuring Donald Trump to abandon the ultimatum in which the US demands that Russia end the war against Ukraine. This is according to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), which notes that this reaction confirms the Russian elite's unwillingness to end the conflict. Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev has openly stated that Trump has no right to determine when peace talks should take place, emphasizing that dialogue will only end after Moscow has achieved all its military objectives. ISW experts believe that these goals include a change of power in Kyiv, a ban on Ukraine's accession to NATO, and a radical reduction of its army.

Earlier, the Kremlin tried to negotiate with the US, offering separate incentives not directly related to the war. **Now, Russia is seeking to continue cooperation with Trump, avoiding new ultimatums and appealing to the deterioration of bilateral relations or the need for a new nuclear security treaty (START).**

After Trump reduced the deadline for the ultimatum from 50 to 10 days, the Kremlin responded again. Russian Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov said that these words had been “taken into account” and at the same time cynically emphasized that Russia allegedly remains committed to the peace process — provided, of course, that its ultimatums are

⁴ Чи погодиться Путін закінчити війну через ультиматум Трампа — розбір аналітика. 17.07.2025.
<https://uatv.ua/uk/chy-pogodytsya-putin-zakinchty-vijnu-cherez-ultymatum-trampa-rozbir-analytyka/>

accepted. Despite the skepticism of Western analysts, the Office of the President of Ukraine is convinced that the new deadlines are realistic and achievable. Volodymyr Zelensky himself called Trump's decision to shorten the deadline a “show of strength” which, in his words, could speed up the end of the war.

However, it is not worth ignoring the fact that Trump's policy today is very chaotic and based on his own subjective and unpredictable approach. There could be many developments in the current US president's egocentric maneuver. In particular, despite his previous fanaticism towards Putin, Trump may now feel humiliated. After all, the glorious image of a “peacemaker” that he has built for himself plays a significant role in his politics and his desire to go down in history. However, even now, American politics resembles American amusement parks. Because of this, few people take Trump's threats and ultimatums seriously, especially Russia and its allies. Donald Trump's statements remain unpredictable, not only for the analytical community but also, apparently, for the American administration itself. The political rhetoric of the 47th US president does not always translate into practical decisions, and against this backdrop, it is difficult to predict the further course of events.

At the same time, changes in the tone of messages coming from Washington can be observed. The rhetoric has indeed changed, and this may be a prelude to tougher actions. At the same time, it is likely that ***The next steps are unlikely to be critical for the Kremlin — so much so as to cause, say, a temporary truce or even a review of the military campaign.***

The only effective tool for influencing Russia at this stage appears to be escalating sanctions. This approach remains a subject of discussion at the highest level — both on the part of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Ukraine's Western partners. At the same time, no radical revision of the format of military assistance is expected — in particular, there is no talk of opening access to unconventional weapons or allowing strikes deep into Russian territory using long-range missiles.

In the short term, such steps are unlikely. However, increased economic pressure on Moscow seems likely. Despite this, Russia continues to demonstrate relative adaptability to sanctions, making extensive use of schemes to circumvent restrictions and external assistance from third countries. Following the change in Washington's rhetoric and the deadlines set by Trump, the most likely response from the US will be to tighten sanctions, particularly in the economic sphere. There seems to be a growing understanding among the political elites in the US and the EU that **the real diplomatic path to resolving the conflict is currently blocked.**

The reason is a fundamental divergence in the goals of the parties. While Russia continues to seek the destruction of Ukrainian statehood, Ukraine's main goal remains the preservation of its sovereignty and very existence as an independent country. In such circumstances, compromise seems unlikely, and diplomatic initiatives appear to be of limited effectiveness.



Source: Army FM

■ *Russia: External and internal challenges*

Trend: *The Kremlin's response to Trump's statement on peace: continuation of the war, information attack on Europe, and counting on China's support*

Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated his demands for a peaceful settlement of the war against Ukraine, including “ensuring the rights of the Russian-speaking population” and the Orthodox Church. In his address, he did not mention either US President Donald Trump's 10-day ultimatum or the nighttime rocket attack on Kyiv, which resulted in casualties.

A few days earlier, Russian media announced Putin's “important statement,” which was expected to be related to the American ultimatum. However, the Kremlin leader completely avoided the topic of Ukraine. On July 28, Donald Trump reduced the previously announced 50-day deadline to 10-12 days, calling on Putin to end the war. He said he was “deeply disappointed” in the Russian leader. If the demand is ignored, Trump threatens to impose tough secondary sanctions. The Kremlin's reaction was restrained. Putin did not comment on them in any way.

On the night of July 31, Russia attacked Kyiv with missiles and drones. One of the strikes completely destroyed the entrance to a nine-story building, causing numerous civilian casualties. As a result of the missile strike on Kyiv, 31 people were killed, including five children, the youngest of whom was only two years old. Another 159 people were injured. The Russian Ministry of Defense announced a “group strike” on military targets, but did not mention

Kyiv. US President Donald Trump called the new Russian strikes 'disgusting' and once again warned of possible tougher sanctions against Moscow. "We are going to impose sanctions — I don't know if he cares about sanctions. They know about sanctions. I know more than anyone else about sanctions and tariffs. I don't know if it will have an effect, but we will do it," Trump said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin did not mention sanctions or Trump's ultimatum in his statement, nor did he mention the American president's name or the recent strike on Kyiv. However, he alluded to Trump's words about "disappointment," noting that disappointment arises from excessive expectations, and suggested conducting reasonable negotiations quietly, rather than publicly. Russian media quoted Putin as saying that Kyiv allegedly believes that now is not the time for negotiations, and that Moscow is ready to wait, unlike Trump. According to Interfax, Putin commented on Zelensky's words about the need to wait for a change of regime in Russia and added: "If the Ukrainian leadership believes that now is not the time, then we must wait: please, we are ready to wait." He said this on Valaam Island during a meeting with Alexander Lukashenko.⁵

Putin confirmed that the demands he made on Ukraine in June 2024 remain in force: withdrawal of troops from four regions (Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia), a written refusal to join NATO, and a declaration of neutral status. On Valaam, he stressed that peace must be based on principles that satisfy both Russia and Ukraine, ensuring the security of both countries.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky responded by saying that if this is a signal of Russia's serious readiness for a dignified and lasting peace, and not just an attempt to buy time, Ukraine is ready for a meeting between the leaders at any time. He called for a move from technical negotiations to direct talks between the presidents, stressing that this idea had already been supported by the US and that Ukraine was also ready if Russia showed the same willingness. From the very beginning of the negotiations in Istanbul, Zelensky has insisted on a meeting at the highest level, but despite three rounds of negotiations and a large-scale exchange of prisoners, no significant progress has been made so far.

Putin commented on the Russian Defense Ministry's statement about the capture of Chasiv Yar, a strategic height in the Donetsk region where fighting has been ongoing since April last year. He said that the city was taken a few days ago and that "cleansing" is continuing, although he acknowledged possible counterattacks. He called Zelensky's denial of this misinformation. Putin also confirmed that the Russian army is advancing across the entire front line and announced the start of serial production of the Oreshnik missile.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump announced that Special Envoy Steve Wiggins will make his fifth visit to Moscow after completing his trip to Israel. This visit is to take place before the end of Trump's ultimatum on Ukraine. Russia has launched strikes on Ukrainian territory, including Kyiv, killing at least 26 civilians, and has used threats and other rhetoric to make it clear to US President Donald Trump that the Kremlin rejects his demand to participate in serious negotiations to end the war, according to a report by the US Institute for the Study of War (ISW).

Meanwhile, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin said that Russia is ready to continue negotiations with Ukraine, but considers discussions of a high-level meeting

⁵ Мир в Україні й ультиматум Трампа. Що на це сказав Путін.01.08.2025.
<https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/c8jp9z2k1v8o>

“premature,” undermining the Trump administration's efforts to launch negotiations, analysts note. The report also mentions publications by the Kremlin's RIA Novosti on July 30 with headlines such as **“There is no other option: no one should remain alive in Ukraine.”** This once again demonstrates the Kremlin's long-standing desire to subjugate all of Ukraine and its increasingly aggressive rhetoric in response to Trump's attempts to involve Russia in the peace process. ISW emphasizes that Russia is not abandoning its goal of conquering Ukraine and is deliberately dragging out negotiations to gain time for new military gains and demand concessions from Kyiv and the West.

During a meeting with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, Vladimir Putin stated that the conditions for ending the war, announced by Russia back in June 2024, remain unchanged. Putin also stressed that Russia seeks to eliminate the causes that, in its opinion, led to the crisis and advocates for a long-term peace that provides for the functioning of the Russian language and the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Regarding the negotiations, the Russian president gave a positive assessment of the rounds in Istanbul, but added that if Kyiv believes that now is not the time for negotiations, Moscow is ready to wait. No new statements regarding the conditions or position were made.

The New York Post writes that Donald Trump's new deadline effectively “leaves Putin less time to kill,” demonstrating a sharp change in American tactics regarding the war in Ukraine. The American president stressed that there is no point in waiting until September 2, as originally planned, so he is shortening the deadline to 10 days. Trump also said he was ready to immediately impose 100% tariffs on countries that buy Russian goods, stressing that the Kremlin “has shown no goodwill.” This decision, according to the publication, has received support among political analysts and experts. They believe that ***The previous deadline only gave Putin more time to continue his aggression.*** In particular, after issuing its ultimatum, Russia immediately launched new strikes on civilian targets in Ukraine.⁶

According to observers, the Kremlin's goal has never been to achieve peace — Russia seeks to destroy Ukraine as a state. Moscow's official response to Trump's demands was dismissive: the Kremlin called his statement “theatrical.” However, analysts warn that the threat of 100% tariffs and secondary sanctions could indeed hit Russia hard. The Kremlin has reason to be concerned: the Russian economy is based on fragile foundations, with over 40% of the budget spent on the war, while citizens live in hardship. In addition, there is a threat of a possible reaction from Russia's key partners — China and India — who may start looking for alternatives due to the threat of secondary sanctions.

Russia's refusal to participate in peace initiatives is not an emotional outburst, but a carefully calculated strategy. The Kremlin is deliberately betting on the depletion of international support for Ukraine, counting on Western society to tire and Ukraine to be unable to withstand a prolonged war. Russia is trying to gain the upper hand not only on the front lines, but also in a protracted geopolitical marathon, where **the main goal is to politically weaken opponents.**

Sergey Lavrov continues to insist that ***the Russian economy has “adapted” to sanctions.*** This message is aimed not only at domestic voters, but also at an international audience— Moscow is not giving up. However, real economic indicators suggest the opposite: rising inflation, falling incomes, and technical degradation are undermining the foundations of the Russian economy. Despite this, the Kremlin is ostentatiously imitating stability. Even after the

⁶ ISW: Кремль ударами по Україні й погрозами відповів Трампу.01.08.2025.
<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-isw-kreml-tramp/33491696.html>

new US tariffs initiated by the Trump administration, it maintains the appearance of calm. This signal is intended to convince Russia's allies — China, Iran, and North Korea — of the regime's stability.

In the rhetoric of second-tier politicians, particularly Sergei Mironov, the idea that economic pressure will not affect the achievement of Russian goals is increasingly being voiced. This demonstrates the irrational ideology of a regime that has lost touch with reality. At the heart of Russia's military strategy lies Vladimir Putin's so-called “theory of victory.” This is not just a political course — it is a personal conviction that Ukraine must suffer complete capitulation. From the first days of the war, the Kremlin has not allowed for compromise — only complete submission. Therefore, Russia does not consider any peaceful scenario that does not involve Ukraine's strategic defeat to be possible. In this worldview, diplomacy is perceived not as a space for finding solutions, but as a sign of the enemy's weakness. *Every initiative for negotiations — even from global players — is interpreted by the Kremlin as proof of its strength, rather than as an invitation to dialogue.*

Putin acts within a logic where historical ambitions, rather than the realities of the modern world, are the key drivers. In his view, the world is not a system of interaction, but a battlefield on which Russia either wins or disappears. That is why even strong warnings from Washington do not change the Kremlin's strategic course. This is where the greatest danger lies. **This paradigm does not allow for any compromises as long as Russia retains the resources for war.** And only in the event of a loss of combat capability — due to exhaustion, crisis, or defeat — can the situation move forward.