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Ukraine – European Union

■ *THEME ANALYSIS: The EU's subjectivity depends on Trump's will*



Source: UnSplash

In May, the European Union approved another, 17th, package of sanctions against Russia, which will affect almost 200 ships that are part of the so-called “shadow” fleet. This was announced by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Kaja Kallas on social media platform X. The list of restricted entities includes, in particular, the Russian oil company Surgutneftegaz and the insurance company VSK. VSK is one of the five largest insurance companies in Russia, and Surgutneftegaz was the third largest oil exporter among Russian companies. According to Kallas, the new restrictions are aimed not only at ships, but also at hybrid threats and human rights violations. She stressed that **as long as the war continues, the EU will continue to increase pressure on Moscow.**

The Office of the President of Ukraine called this package an “important step” in strengthening sanctions pressure on Russia. Head of the Office Andrii Yermak said that the restrictions affect key elements of Russia's military infrastructure, including its “shadow” fleet and export control circumvention schemes. He added that the document takes into account numerous proposals from the Ukrainian sanctions group.

According to Yermak, the new sanctions will affect 17 individuals and 58 companies, as well as 189 vessels used by Russia to transport oil, weapons, and stolen Ukrainian grain. A total of 342 vessels are already under sanctions. Companies from other countries – Turkey, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, and the UAE – that helped the Russian military-industrial complex by supplying components for drones and missiles and helped circumvent sanctions will also be affected. This is the first time the EU has imposed economic sanctions as part of its fight against hybrid threats – for physical attacks on Estonian territory, underwater sabotage, and support for pro-Russian actions in EU countries.

The EU Council has also imposed restrictions on 21 individuals and six organizations involved in destabilization outside Russia. Among those targeted is Viktor Medvedchuk, a former Ukrainian politician who, through Artem Marchevsky and Oleg Voloshin, controlled Ukrainian media outlets to promote pro-Russian propaganda. The EU Council statement notes that through the financing of the media resource Voice of Europe and the related political initiative Drugaia Ukraina (Another Ukraine) ***Medvedchuk contributed to undermining the authority of the Ukrainian government and promoting Russia's foreign policy interests.*** Some of the new restrictions are aimed at individuals involved in human rights violations, including judges, law enforcement officials, and prison system employees who participated in the persecution of opposition leader Alexei Navalny and former political prisoner Vladimir Kara-Murza. Russian military units involved in the use of chemical weapons against Ukrainian citizens have also been added to the sanctions list. “We are continuing to work to ensure that the next packages of sanctions are even more powerful and as coordinated as possible with our key partners,” Andrii Yermak said.

У новому санкційному списку також опинилися великі російські компанії та установи: нафтова корпорація «Сургутнефтегаз», машинобудівний холдинг «Стан» (що є частиною держкорпорації «Ростех»), страхова компанія ВСК, золотодобувна фірма «Атлас Майнінг», виробник безпілотників «Беспілотні системи», музей-заповідник «Херсонес Таврійський» та виробник зброї Lobaev Arms. Окрім того, 2 червня Департамент економіки, освіти та досліджень Швейцарії ухвалив рішення щодо впровадження частини 17-го пакета санкцій Європейського Союзу проти Росії. У межах цих заходів швейцарська влада розширила санкційний список, включивши до нього ще 17 фізичних осіб і 89 компаній, які вже потрапили під обмеження з боку ЄС. Також Швейцарія оновила та розширила список заборонених до експорту товарів. Це доволі значущий крок для нейтральної держави.

It should be noted that **The European Union and the United Kingdom have announced a new round of sanctions against Russia without waiting for support from the United States.** This happened the day after a telephone conversation between President Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, which did not result in any agreement on a ceasefire in Ukraine. Although Washington has not announced any immediate sanctions in response, EU leaders are actively calling on the Trump administration to join the restrictive measures. In Brussels, hopes are rising again that the US and its European partners will still act together on sanctions. “We have repeatedly made it clear that we expect only one thing from Russia: an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. Since the Kremlin has not done so, we have been forced to respond. We hope that the US will not leave this unanswered either,” said German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl (CDU) during a meeting in Brussels.

At the same time, US President Donald Trump said he was considering further steps after the European Union and the United Kingdom announced new sanctions against Russia. He did not announce any specific decisions or details. “We are considering many options, we'll see,” Trump told reporters after meeting with Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill, according to Reuters.

It is also worth noting that **over more than three years of Russia's war against Ukraine, the EU has adopted 17 packages of sanctions, but none of them have fully affected the Russian energy sector.** The oil price cap set by the G7 countries in 2022 is now ineffective: the price per barrel has fallen, and the cap no longer limits Russia's profits.

The European Commission is currently working on the 18th package of sanctions. It will include new restrictions on energy: sanctions against both Nord Stream pipelines, a review of the price cap on oil, and a gradual phase-out of Russian gas. There are also plans to tighten control over the “shadow fleet” and ban new contracts for energy supplies from Russia. Despite the reduction in imports, the EU remains the main buyer of Russian gas.

According to French MP Thomas Pellerin-Carlin, France is among the leaders in this regard. ***In 2024, the EU spent nearly €3.2 billion more on Russian fuel than on aid to Ukraine.*** Hungary and Slovakia remain the largest importers. In addition, imports of Russian LNG to France, Belgium, and Spain have increased. Analysts explain that without direct bans, traders are exploiting legal loopholes.¹

The EU no longer imports Russian coal, oil accounts for only 3% of the market (previously 27%), and gas accounts for 13% (before the invasion, it was almost 50%). The Kremlin tried to use energy resources as a tool for blackmail, but thanks to subsidies and diversification of supplies, Europe avoided an energy disaster.

The European Commission plans to completely stop importing Russian gas by 2027. Member states must prepare individual plans to abandon Russian energy sources. There are also plans to make imports of Russian nuclear fuel economically unprofitable. However, there are risks: in particular, the possibility of circumventing sanctions via Turkey, which re-exports Russian gas. The issues of the origin of raw materials and responsibility for violating sanctions remain unresolved. Hungary and Slovakia oppose the new sanctions. Experts suggest encouraging the transition to alternative energy sources with funding.

Brussels also wants to ban the use of Nord Stream pipelines. According to the European Commission, a legal ban will make their future operation impossible. This decision was prompted by reports of a potential resumption of gas pipeline construction with US support. There are also plans to lower the price cap on Russian oil from \$60 to \$45 per barrel. Experts are calling for tighter controls, as traders often manipulate prices. But the US is against supporting new sanctions. ***President Donald Trump believes that the new restrictions could harm the peace process.*** However, Brussels hopes that the US will join if Russia continues to refuse to agree to a ceasefire.

On May 18, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent stressed that the United States, together with its European partners, is ready to impose additional restrictions without delay if Russian President Vladimir Putin does not demonstrate a real interest in a peaceful settlement of the conflict with Ukraine. However, after a telephone conversation with Putin on May 19, Trump made it clear that he currently sees no need for new sanctions, as, in his words, “there is a chance” to make progress on ending the fighting. Earlier, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that the administration had asked Congress to give it more time for diplomatic efforts before imposing new restrictions.²

In April, a group of 50 US lawmakers, including Republican Senator Lindsey Graham and Democrat Senator Richard Blumenthal, initiated a bipartisan bill. The document provides for the introduction of tough sanctions against Russia in the event of a breakdown in peace talks, including both primary and secondary sanctions. Among other things, it proposes imposing 500% tariffs on imports from countries that purchase Russian oil and oil products.

When the European Commission began informing EU member states last month about the preparation of a new package of sanctions against Russia, all 27 states expected to receive specific written proposals. However, they still have not received an official document. Usually, such projects — this time, we are talking about a possible 18th package of sanctions since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine — arrive a few days after the first briefings. Such documents clearly outline the measures being considered by the European Commission. After

¹ Нові санкції ЄС проти Росії: яка причина зволікання? 03.06.2025. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/rfe-rl-sanktsiyi-rf/33432903.html>

² "Побачимо": Трамп — про дії США після того, як ЄС і Британія запровадили санкції проти РФ. 20.05.2025. <https://suspilne.media/1022389-pobacimo-tramp-pro-dii-ssa-pisla-togo-ak-es-i-britania-zaprovadili-sankcii-proti-rf/>

that, member states determine their “red lines,” as the adoption of sanctions requires the full consent of all EU members.

There are two key reasons. Firstly, some EU countries, notably Germany and France, have been cautious and decided to wait for the results of peace talks between Ukraine and Russia, which took place on June 2 in Istanbul. Anonymous sources in EU institutions told Radio Liberty that they have no illusions about the Kremlin's readiness for genuine dialogue. However, even skeptical officials believe it is advisable to wait and see if there will be any results. So far, the parties have only agreed to exchange the bodies of dead and seriously wounded soldiers, without achieving any breakthrough in ending the longest and bloodiest war. This position has been taken by some European countries and the US. Brussels, for its part, is interested in Washington's support to strengthen the effect of new sanctions.

European diplomats acknowledge that although the sanctions policy is no longer as coordinated as it was under the Biden administration, they still seek to coordinate further actions with the US. They are pleased that America is not pushing for a “hasty and weak peace agreement” and has not moved away from the issue of sanctions, despite Donald Trump's rhetoric. US support could also be key to convincing individual EU member states, such as Hungary — where the government is led by Trump ally Viktor Orbán — to agree to new restrictions, despite doubts about their effectiveness.

European diplomats familiar with the details report that one of the key points is the revision of the price cap set by the G7 countries. It is currently \$60 per barrel, but there is consideration of lowering the price cap on Russian oil to \$45. G7 leaders are expected to discuss this issue at their summit in Canada on June 15-17. Formally, \$50 could be a compromise figure.³

So, the EU continues to exert pressure on Russia, but the effectiveness of this strategy remains questionable due to a lack of consensus within the union. Although Europe is ready to act without the US, it is doing so cautiously, hoping that Washington will come to its senses and take reliable action. However, the policy of the current US president suggests the opposite, while European decisions remain stagnant.

³ Росія у лещатах санкцій ЄС. Чи втрутиться Вашингтон?.24.05.2025.
<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/sanktsiy-yevrosoyuzu-rosiya-enerhonosiyi/33423098.html>

Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine

- **THEME ANALYSIS:** *The revival of the USSR, according to Vladimir Putin's plan, lies in the return of its territories to Russia*



Source: AP

If Russia manages to regroup its troops after the end of the war in Ukraine, it may try to strike even those countries that do not currently take the Russian threat seriously. The Kremlin, led by Vladimir Putin, is guided by the idea of restoring the empire — **creating a conditional second USSR**. This opinion was expressed by David Grigoryan, senior research fellow at the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at Harvard Kennedy School, in his column for The Telegraph.⁴

According to Grigoryan, Putin remains focused on countries that were once part of the Soviet Union. He believes that European leaders generally take the threat from Russia seriously, but often underestimate the strategic importance of the Caucasus, Central Asia, Belarus, and Moldova for Europe's long-term security. If Putin succeeds in bringing the former Soviet republics back under Kremlin control, this will give him access to additional resources, including human reserves for potential future conflicts in Europe, the analyst warns. Therefore, in his opinion, it is extremely risky to allow Ukraine to be defeated, as this would allow Russia to present the situation as its strategic victory.

David Grigoryan notes that in some cases, Putin may achieve his goal of restoring Soviet influence fairly quickly. He estimates that **Belarus**, which is already effectively in Moscow's political orbit, will be the first in this process. The analyst also believes that it will not be difficult for Russia to establish control over Armenia, which, according to him, remains perhaps the most dependent on Putin's influence among all the former republics of the USSR.

Another potential target for expansion, according to Grigoryan, is **Georgia**. He points out that the ruling party in the country, Georgian Dream, is pro-Russian. Although the majority of Georgia's population is Western-oriented, Putin may try to suppress resistance with the help of internal allies in Tbilisi. As for **Azerbaijan**, at the first stage *the country will likely be able*

⁴ Путін одержимий метою відродити СРСР: аналітик розкрив довгостроковий план диктатора. 30.05.2025. <https://www.unian.ua/world/rosiya-srsr-analitik-rozkryv-dovgostrokovi-y-plan-putina-12961128.html>

to avoid direct Russian intervention thanks to its strategic partnership with Turkey and close ties with Israel. However, Grigoryan warns that Putin could take advantage of Iran's support and use interethnic conflicts to destabilize the situation in Azerbaijan.

As for the countries of Central Asia, the analyst is confident that they will not be able to seriously resist the Kremlin's influence. He believes that in the event of Russian aggression, *Kazakhstan* could capitulate in just a few hours or voluntarily agree to join a new geopolitical alliance led by Moscow. According to Grigoryan's forecasts, *Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan* may also be willing to join this formation, guided by security interests and political survival.

Meanwhile, Russian State Duma deputy Viktor Sobolev has publicly stated the ultimate goal of Russia's aggression: to *unite Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* into a single state. Focus magazine analyzed why the Kremlin has not yet abandoned the idea of recreating the "Union" and what lies behind this concept. Viktor Sobolev, a retired general and State Duma deputy, stated that *The main goal of the war is to create a so-called union state that will unite Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians.*

His statement was published on the Telegram channel of the Russian media outlet RTVI. In his comment, Sobolev noted that **The "complete solution" to the war lies precisely in the formation of a united state of three peoples, which, in his opinion, will realize the concept of the "Russian world."** He also cited historical examples in which he interpreted Kyiv as a "Russian city" and called Princes Vladimir the Great and Yaroslav the Wise Russians. Sobolev believes that without this unification, "the country will not survive."

Andriy Kovalenko, head of the Center for Countering Disinformation, responded to these statements. He noted that the idea of creating a united state arose back in 2001, when Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed it with then-Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma. However, the initiative did not find support at that time. According to Kovalenko, the Kremlin has repeatedly returned to this concept, but attempts to implement it have failed. Sobolev's comments, according to the official, merely repeat Putin's position.

Political scientist Oleg Posternak notes in an interview with Focus that such ambitions are nothing more than a remnant of Soviet nostalgia and a demonstration of the deep resentment that part of Russian society still feels after the collapse of the USSR. Putin considers this event to be "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century." According to the political scientist, the restoration of the Soviet Union is unrealistic — neither from a political, military, nor legal point of view. It is a past that will have no future. The states of Central Asia are actively forming their national identity and strengthening cooperation with China. Azerbaijan, Georgia, and even more so European countries such as Germany do not accept any form of a new "Union" because it contradicts their interests and stability. As for Ukraine, such a scenario was utopian for it from the outset. After the events of 2014, the country finally set a course for independence, and the large-scale invasion by the Russian Federation in 2022 only strengthened this desire. The Ukrainian people are resisting Russian neo-imperialism and continuing to fight for their right to independent existence, the political scientist emphasizes.

The idea of "restoring the USSR" in contemporary Russian political discourse serves more as propaganda than as a real political course. It serves as a tool to appease that part of Russian society that cannot come to terms with the fact that in 2022 Russia failed in its attempt to destroy Ukrainian statehood. "The failure of this plan created a need for symbolic 'replacement'. And such a replacement for the authorities in Moscow became the conditional image of a 'new USSR'. If Putin had managed to establish control over most of Ukraine's territory in 2022, it is quite likely that by the end of the year he would have announced the creation of a union state including the captured regions," explains the political scientist.

However, this did not happen. And now, even with the use of force, such a scenario is unrealistic. The Kremlin no longer has the necessary potential — neither in military, political, nor ideological terms. Putin simply does not have the means to achieve this goal. However, this does not mean that he will not try to do so. The idea of creating a union state is gaining popularity again among Russian politicians.

Retired British colonel and former commander of NATO's rapid response force for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats, Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, emphasized in his column for The Telegraph that most Europeans understand that if Putin captures Kyiv, he will not stop there.⁵ **He emphasizes that Russian President Vladimir Putin is not interested in achieving peace at all — his real goal is to restore the Soviet model of influence.** *«Putin believes he is winning, so why should he stop now and admit defeat after sacrificing a million lives?»* — the author asks rhetorically. According to de Bretton-Gordon, the Kremlin's demands are completely unacceptable:

- NATO returning to its 1997 positions,
- The Baltic states, Finland, and Sweden leaving the Alliance,
- Recognition of the annexation of Ukrainian territories,
- No NATO troops on Ukrainian territory,
- Full integration of Ukraine into Russia and a break in relations between the US and Europe.

The colonel points out that Putin has partially achieved the latter goal, as Western intelligence agencies believe he is confident of ultimate victory, especially given his advances on many fronts. De Breton-Gordon also recalled that Russian losses in the war have already exceeded one million people, and Putin is well aware that after the end of hostilities, he will have to face the outrage of “Russia's mothers.” Therefore, he is trying to delay this moment as long as possible. According to the expert, the West should consider all possible options for action. Only force can stop Putin — establishing a no-fly zone over Ukraine or introducing NATO troops into its territory could deter the Russian offensive. Only when Putin sees that the West is determined will he begin to seriously consider the possibility of peace.

“Europeans who are carefully analyzing Putin's actions understand well that he will not stop at Ukraine if he takes Kyiv. He wants to revive the Soviet Union. Putin is not seeking peace — he wants a final victory in Ukraine and believes he can achieve it. We, especially in Europe, need to clearly understand this reality and shape our policy accordingly,” the military analyst concluded.

So it is clear that if Putin does not stop now, Ukraine will not be his last victim. And for the West, this will have catastrophic consequences. The only question is when our partners will come to this realization and take concrete action.

⁵ Путін хоче відновити СРСР, він не зацікавлений у мирі, - британський полковник.16.03.2025.
<https://www.unian.ua/world/viy-na-v-ukrajini-putin-hoche-vidnoviti-srsr-vin-ne-zacikavleniy-u-miri-12946734.html>



Source: Army FM

■ Changes at the front

Trend: *The war has entered its climactic phase: the Russians have launched a large-scale offensive, sharply intensifying combat operations despite direct negotiations with Ukraine.*

The objectives of Russia's summer offensive are to reach major cities: Kostiantynivka, Siversk, Kupiansk, Borova, as well as to encircle Pokrovsk and start street fighting there.

The situation on the front line remains extremely difficult. Fighting continues in **the Sumy, Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions.**

The situation in the Kramatorsk direction remains tense — Russia is exerting pressure along the entire line of contact, using tactics of small-group assaults in foot formations of 2-3 people, supported by artillery and drones. The occupiers are using any available means of transport to move around — motorcycles, civilian cars, and armored vehicles. In this direction, the enemy has made significant advances southwest of Kostiantynivka. The Russians have entered a settlement located 8 km from the city.

The situation in the Toretsk direction is particularly difficult. Urban fighting continues in Toretsk, which has been almost completely destroyed by Russians. At the same time, the Russians are using breakthrough tactics that have already been used: Russia breaks through with a limited number of infantry and secures a small area, and then reinforcements arrive. In May, the Russians broke through to Diliivka and are moving towards Pleshchiivka.

In the Pokrovsk direction, the situation has become much more complicated over the month of May. The enemy's breakthrough on the Pokrovsk-Kostiantynivka highway has worsened the situation, as the Russians are now conducting assaults in the directions of

Novoekonomichne and Myrnohrad. Despite the huge number of attacks, the Russians have not been able to advance in the directions of Pokrovsk, Myrnohrad, or Novoekonomichne.

The situation is also difficult in the **Novopavlivka direction**. In May, Russians managed to break through to the Bagatyr area on the Kurakhove-Zaporizhzhia highway and to the village of Odradne.

In the Sumy direction, the Russians opened a new front in the north of the country. At the same time, Ukrainian cities are under powerful combined attacks by drones and missiles — some of the largest since the start of the full-scale war. Russia is seeking to advance deeper into the region and shell Sumy to cause internal tension and force people to leave their homes. Active fighting is ongoing in the Sumy region, but the Russians do not have enough forces to capture the regional center

■ *Military assistance*

Denmark has announced a 26th package of military aid to Ukraine. In particular, it provides support for aviation. The total value of the package is approximately €562.8 million (DKK 4.2 billion) for the period 2025–2028. Funding is provided through the Fund for Ukraine, as well as through compensation payments from the European Peace Fund (EPF). Part of the funds will be directed to the Czech initiative for joint procurement of ammunition, and the rest will be transferred directly to Ukraine.

In addition, Denmark will finance equipment for the Ukrainian Air Force and the expansion of training infrastructure. The package is also intended to assist in the training and equipping of Ukrainian brigades within the framework of the North Baltic Initiative. The country has already transferred about 20 Caesar self-propelled artillery systems to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, partially financed the purchase of 16 Zuzana self-propelled artillery systems, as well as an undisclosed number of M109A3 self-propelled artillery systems, restored from storage.

Denmark also actively supports the Ukrainian Air Force — it has agreed to transfer F-16 fighter jets, Stinger portable anti-aircraft missile systems, missiles for other anti-aircraft systems, and other weapons and equipment. In addition, Denmark was the first to place a direct order for Ukrainian Bogdan self-propelled guns with immediate transfer to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, thus launching the so-called “Danish model” of support. In May, it became known that Denmark would allocate €830 million from frozen Russian assets to finance the purchase of weapons from Ukrainian manufacturers.

Purchasing weapons directly from Ukrainian companies not only supports the country's economy, but also contributes to the development of the national defense-industrial complex and allows weapons to be better adapted to the real needs of the front. Denmark had previously allocated 317 million kroner (approximately €42.5 million) for the purchase of artillery ammunition for Ukraine.⁶

⁶ Новий пакет військової допомоги від Данії: підтримка авіації, снаряди та навчальна інфраструктура. 09.06.2025. <https://military.com/uk/news/novyj-paket-vijskovoyi-dopomogy-vid-daniyi-pidtrymka-f-16-snaryady-ta-navchalna-infrastruktura/>

■ *Russia: External and internal challenges*

Trend: *The “victory” parade: celebrating the end of World War II or the beginning of World War III?*

Victory Day is a key holiday in the Russian state calendar — a central element of the Kremlin's efforts to emphasize the role of the Soviet Union in defeating Nazi Germany. In recent years, the parade on Red Square has become not only a celebration of a historic victory, but also a platform for President Vladimir Putin, who uses it to glorify Russia's current war against Ukraine. According to Western analysts, Russia's total losses in this conflict, both dead and wounded, have already exceeded 750,000 people.

For Kremlin commentators, May 9 is not just a date — it is an important indicator that can give an idea of the changes in the thinking of Putin, who has been leading the country for more than a quarter of a century, as well as the general political line of the Russian leadership. This is especially relevant this year, against the backdrop of the 80th anniversary of Nazi Germany's surrender and more than three years of full-scale war in Ukraine.

“Victory in the 'Great Patriotic War' is the basis of Putin's political mythology.”, the foundation of his view of world history,” notes Mikhail Zygar, a Russian journalist and writer in exile, in his essay. “The Kremlin had been preparing for this moment for many months; it is a central event in the regime's propaganda calendar.” According to Soviet estimates, more than 27 million people — both military and civilian — died during the so-called “Great Patriotic War.” In Ukraine and other European countries, this war is called World War II. For a long time, this enormous human tragedy served as a symbol of the heroism of all the peoples of the USSR — in particular, Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians.

During his presidency, beginning in 2000, Vladimir Putin systematically used Victory Day celebrations to strengthen his own authority, especially among veterans. This day also became a tool for criticizing the West: the Kremlin often downplayed the role of the Allies, particularly the United States, in the victory over Nazism. In a speech on May 9, 2007 ***Putin veiledly compared US foreign policy to the actions of Nazi Germany***, which caused a significant international response.

After the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Russian leader incorporated the theme of “neo-Nazism” even more actively into his rhetoric. Speaking in public, he constantly repeats unsubstantiated claims about a “Nazi junta” in Kyiv, which the Kremlin uses to justify its military aggression. This year's parade in the Kremlin had special significance. According to official Kremlin information, more than 20 heads of state agreed to attend the celebrations in Moscow, although last-minute cancellations are possible. The leaders of some post-Soviet countries, such as Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan, as well as representatives from Bolivia, Cuba, Venezuela, Laos, Brazil, and several other countries, were expected to attend. None of the European Union leaders, with the exception of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, were expected in Moscow. Fico is known for his critical statements about Ukraine.

The most attention was focused on Chinese President Xi Jinping, who remains one of the Kremlin's most important partners in the current confrontation with the West. China continues to buy Russian energy resources, thereby helping to sustain the Russian economy under sanctions. Despite this, Beijing has not openly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

“Xi's presence in Moscow demonstrates internal contradictions in China's foreign policy,” said Patricia Kim, an analyst at the Brookings Institution. “Although strategic cooperation with Russia is deepening, China seeks to maintain its image as a responsible world leader and an alternative to Western unpredictability.” Particular attention should be paid to the Chinese

military contingent among the participants in the parade on Red Square. This gesture was a clear confirmation of solidarity with Moscow.⁷

During the Cold War, the anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917 was considered the main holiday in the USSR — it was in November that the largest military parades took place. Western analysts carefully studied the equipment paraded across Red Square, especially missiles and launchers, trying to assess the real capabilities of the Soviet army. However, over the past ten years *The Kremlin made Victory Day the central event* its political calendar. This was accompanied by the active militarization of celebrations: the latest weapons appeared at parades, including T-14 Armata tanks (first presented in 2015), although they have not yet been used on the front lines in Ukraine. In 2016, the Yars intercontinental missile was shown to the public. After 2022, the scale of the technical demonstration was reduced due to real combat losses and a shortage of weapons.

Against the backdrop of a large-scale war in Ukraine and mutual drone and missile strikes, this year's May 9 celebrations are accompanied by particular security concerns. On May 6, Ukraine carried out one of the most powerful drone attacks in recent months. Despite calls for a temporary ceasefire initiated by the US, Russia has de facto refused to support them, although Putin offered three days of silence and Zelensky offered thirty.

Faced with a shortage of resources and personnel, Moscow is increasingly turning to external assistance, primarily from North Korea. In June 2024, Putin visited Pyongyang, where he signed a mutual defense agreement with Kim Jong-un. According to US sources, shortly before that, North Korea had already transferred hundreds of thousands of artillery shells and missiles to Russia. At the end of the year, it became known that more than 11,000 North Korean soldiers had been deployed in Russia's border areas — especially in the Kursk region, where Russia was trying to hold back the Ukrainian offensive. The Russian command officially recognized the effectiveness of these troops' actions.

In addition to military cooperation, Pyongyang also provided Russia with civilian personnel: North Korean builders and workers who now work on infrastructure projects in Siberia and the Far East. There are reports that some wounded Russian soldiers were even taken to North Korea for treatment. It is symbolic that during this year's parade in Vladivostok, delegations from North Korea appeared in the column of children in military uniforms — a sign not only of military but also ideological rapprochement between the two authoritarian regimes.

If we carefully analyze the composition of the participants in this year's May 9 parade on Red Square, *One might get the impression that China, Russia, several Central Asian states, some African autocracies, Mongolia, and Brazil won World War II. The event resembled more a post-Soviet gathering of Russia's geopolitical allies than a celebration of the common victory over Nazism.*

The absence of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, despite his pro-Russian stance, is clearly dictated by domestic political considerations, in particular the risk of losing EU funding. On the other hand, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico openly visited Moscow, which can be seen as an attempt to conclude new energy agreements against the backdrop of the country's difficult economic situation.

Among the invitees were also representatives of Vietnam, Myanmar, Armenia, and some African countries — states that cooperate with Russia for military, political, or economic gain. Their participation is situational and motivated by a desire to maintain Moscow's favor.

⁷ День перемоги в РФ: 5 речей, на які варто звернути увагу.08.05.2025. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/rfe-rl-den-peremohy-u-moskvi-parad/33407572.html>

The presence of the Brazilian delegation evokes a separate reaction, given its policy of “neutrality,” which in practice means refusing to impose sanctions against Russia, proposing a peace plan that effectively accepts the annexation of territories, and balancing between the West and Russia in order to strengthen its position in the Global South.

However, the main figure of the event was Chinese leader Xi Jinping, who made a symbolic visit to Moscow. Russian media portrayed him as a “senior partner,” and communication during the parade clearly indicated a change in hierarchy: China is increasingly playing the role of patron, while Russia is playing the role of junior ally. China consistently uses the rhetoric of “eternal friendship” as an element of its foreign strategy. Its position on the war in Ukraine remains formally neutral, but statements about “eliminating the root causes of the conflict” effectively echo key themes of Russian propaganda about NATO expansion and “threats to the security of the Russian Federation.”

The May 9 parade was intended to demonstrate international support for Putin, but in reality **he confirmed Moscow's strategic dependence on Beijing. In the presence of the Chinese leader, the focus shifted from celebrating victory to establishing a new world order in which China is gradually taking over the geopolitical initiative.**

China also uses a symbolic reinterpretation of the legacy of World War II for internal mobilization. Plans to hold celebrations marking the 80th anniversary of the victory over Japan indicate Beijing's attempt to position itself as the heir to the victorious coalition — similar to the Russian narrative of May 9.⁸ In economic terms, Russia's dependence on China is growing: more than 78% of Russian exports to China are raw materials, while most imports are high-tech goods. Trade between the two countries exceeds \$245 billion, giving Beijing significant leverage.

The joint statement following the visit confirms the agreement of both sides to resolve the war by “eliminating the root causes,” which opens up space for Chinese mediation — but on terms favorable to China itself. ***The concept of “indivisible security” promoted by Beijing requires that Russia's interests be taken into account in the future security architecture, effectively undermining Ukraine's sovereignty.***

⁸ Сі Цзіньпін і Путін – що означає візит на парад перемоги у Москві – новини світу.12.05.2025.
<https://renews.com.ua/svit/moldova-poperedila-pro-zagrozi-v-rosiyi/>