



Europe caught out by Trump's Russia move



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Europe caught out by Trump's Russia move CHRISTOPHE PETIT TESSON/POOL/AFP v Five foreign ministers meet in Paris on Wednesday - Spain's Jose Manuel Albares, Ukraine's Andrii Sybiha, France's Jean-Noel Barrot, EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas and, Germany's Annalena Baerbock.

Foreign ministers from major European countries joined their Ukrainian counterpart on Wednesday, as news of Trump's call with Putin emerged. Arriving at Nato headquarters early on Thursday, Europe's defence ministers had one common message - that there could be no negotiations about Ukraine without Ukraine and Europe at the table too. The question is to what extent the US is listening. After a frenetic 24 hours of US declarations, there is a tangible sense that Europe's leaders have been caught by surprise; that they now fear being bypassed on any potential Ukraine deal and being deprived of a voice on the future of European security. Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock spoke of Donald Trump's call with Vladimir Putin as being "very much out of the blue", even if the US president had made it clear for months that he was aiming to bring a quick end to the war.

"There can be no negotiation about Ukraine without Ukraine," said the UK's John Healey. "The same is true for Europe," warned Dutch Defence Secretary Ruben Brekelmans. Because of course what is negotiated also has implications for Europe, so we think Europe should also sit at the table. "Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk ramméd home the message on X when he posted: "All we need is peace. A just peace. Ukraine, Europe and the United States should work on this together. Together, The US is clearly engaging with its Nato allies and Ukraine. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth is spending two days at Nato HQ and Vice-President JD Vance will see Volodymyr Zelensky at the Munich Security Conference.

But Europe's problem, and specifically the EU's problem, is that it struggles to speak with one voice and present a united vision. Ursula von der Leyen, the EU's most recognisable figurehead, met Hegseth this week but has been barely visible since. Europe's leaders have had plenty of time to prepare for Trump's peace plan. Now they're left wondering whether the US is listening to them, or even reading their communiqués.

The UK joined Poland, France, Germany, Italy and Spain late on Wednesday in agreeing that the security of the European continent was "our common responsibility" and that a just and lasting peace in Ukraine was necessary for transatlantic security too. Baerbock told German radio that obviously Europe could not replace the US in military support for Ukraine, but a strong Europe was in US interest and it had to be made clear that "the USA needs us too"