

Moscow's Ultimatum and Border Closures: Europe in Check

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The conflict in Ukraine has reached a **dramatic turning point**, becoming a formidable **political, diplomatic and military short circuit** that is shaking the foundations of Europe's security architecture. As Washington sketches out audacious moves — with Donald Trump's envoys offering Volodymyr Zelensky the prospect of **NATO membership in exchange for ceding the entire Donbas** —, the Kremlin is raising the stakes with an **unacceptable ultimatum**. Moscow is demanding that **NATO return to its 1997 positions**, effectively dismantling the defenses of the entire eastern flank, from Poland to the Baltic states and Romania.

This scenario evokes the specter of a **"new Yalta"**, a summit at which major powers decide the fate of the Old Continent over Europeans' heads, turning back the clock to the darkest hours of the Cold War.

The Kremlin's trap: a return to 1997 and spheres of influence

The document handed by Russian officials to U.S. mediators leaves no room for interpretation and **makes Vladimir Putin's imperial design explicit**:

- Russia demands that **NATO forces completely withdraw from countries that joined the Alliance after 1997**, reducing Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to a **gray zone without credible security guarantees**.
- The model invoked by Moscow is that of the former **Warsaw Pact**, based on **rigid spheres of influence** and the subjugation of a Europe reduced to military and strategic impotence.
- Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reiterated that any guarantee against NATO expansion must be **legally binding**, accusing the West of having violated the verbal promises made at the time.

In the face of this diplomatic and military offensive, Moscow's blackmail is becoming increasingly **explicit and threatening** every day.

The cynicism of endless war and the shadow of domestic failure

Behind the harshness of Russia's demands lies not only a strategy of strength, but the regime's **existential fear**.According to Abbas Gallyamov, Putin's former speechwriter and now a political scientist in exile, the Kremlin leader **is no longer fighting to win, but to avoid being held accountable for the failure of his original objectives**:

- As long as the war continues, defeats and devastating human losses can be justified as **contingent necessities at the front**.
- The day a ceasefire is reached without a clear victory, the Russian people will ask the fateful question: **what was all this for?**
- The continuation of hostilities therefore has an **independent political value** for the despot in Moscow, who uses the conflict as a shield to postpone the day of reckoning and accountability before his own country.

A fractured Europe facing the abyss

The real breaking point of this crisis lies in the **complete marginalization of the European Union**, trapped by its internal divisions and caught off guard by negotiations conducted over its head. America swings between reckless overtures and unilateral moves, while Europe risks

paying the highest price in a **historic reckoning**.

The challenge facing the West allows no hesitation: it must either recover **firm strategic unity** and the ability to defend its fundamental principles, or succumb to the blackmail of brute force and imperial restoration.