

Statement to the press by Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic, in Washington.

Q. – Good evening, Mr President. There were high expectations for today. Did it produce the results you hoped for ?

THE PRESIDENT – I think it was an important day, in any case. It will certainly have an effect on the evolution of this conflict, particularly because of the unprecedented configuration of this meeting, which brought together President Trump, President Zelenskyy and several European leaders, as well as the President of the [EU] Commission and the NATO Secretary General, to the White House to discuss the next steps to take. We all agree that we want peace. That's what unites us. We agreed on several important courses of action that had been less clear a few days or weeks ago.

The first – and in my view the most important – of these is the US commitment to work with us on security guarantees. In February, when I convened several European leaders to meet with President Zelenskyy at a time of emerging doubt, we had the impression that the possibility of achieving a real peace might be compromised precisely in order to come up with these security guarantees. It was a long road. Since February, we have built a Coalition of the Willing that is now composed of 30 countries. And today it was decided that we will work with the United States on the content of these security guarantees and the forms of cooperation that the various parties are prepared to commit to. This afternoon, I was also able to revisit the content of the security guarantees : they consist of a robust Ukrainian army capable of resisting and deterring any attempted attack, with no limits as to numbers, capability, weaponry, etc. And the allies are also prepared to provide Ukraine with reassurance forces in the air, on land and at sea. These are concrete, robust, solid things. That was the first point we decided on today ; we launched a process that will begin tomorrow and will be led by our diplomatic and security advisors and our joint chiefs of staff. Preparations for this effort were already in place, you know ; it was coordinated by the British and French joint chiefs and presented in July.

The second point concerns the principle of a series of meetings and the need for the killing to stop in order for these meetings to take place. Call it a “truce” or a “ceasefire”, but we can't talk while bombs are falling. We all agreed on this. Following our first meeting, President Putin and President Trump spoke by phone, and it was decided that an effort would be made to plan a bilateral meeting between President Zelenskyy and President Putin in a location that will be determined in the coming hours. That meeting will be followed by a trilateral meeting between President Putin, President Trump and President Zelenskyy. As part of the process, I wanted that meeting to be followed by another meeting that would include the Europeans as well as the Turks – in other words all those whose security is directly affected by the outcome of this conflict. And I think there would be a series of meetings to articulate follow-up operations.

Lastly, President Trump believes that he is able to bring about an agreement ; he also believes that President Putin wants such a peace agreement ; and for my part, I welcome this and would like to believe it, after the meetings they had. But if President Putin should reject this process, we also all agree that we must step up sanctions, or in any case, take an approach that places greater pressure on the Russians to return to the negotiating table. That, in substance, is what we decided today. It's just one step, you know ; we're far from proclaiming victory. But when I look at where we were a few months ago, when I look at where we were a few days ago, I think we've built real Ukrainian-European unity and that the Europeans, Ukraine and the United States are truly seeing eye to eye with respect to security guarantees and upcoming operations, and are showing a real willingness to work together.

Q. – In what timeframe could these bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral meetings that you want be held ?

THE PRESIDENT – As soon as possible : the intention is for the bilateral meeting to be in the next few days. We said that in the next two or three weeks we should be able to hold the trilateral meeting and that things will snap into place. In any case, our intention is to end the conflict as quickly as possible.

Q. – On the formats of the meetings to be held, first of all the bilateral one between President Zelenskyy and President Putin, isn't this meeting risky ? You repeated in Brégançon yesterday that you thought President Putin wants war. What makes you think today that the meeting can have a positive outcome ? And when you say, “a two-way meeting, then a three-way meeting”, where do the Europeans fit into those formats ?

THE PRESIDENT – Yes. But we're doing it sequentially and it's entirely logical. We're starting from a situation where neither Ukraine nor Europe was at the table : the meeting, the Anchorage summit in Alaska. Now we're saying there's a desire, at any rate, to discuss the underlying problems. There hasn't really been a Russian-Ukrainian meeting since the series of meetings that were held in Istanbul in the spring of 2022. So it's a step forward. And I can't pre-empt these results. Do I think they can be conclusive ? I'm remaining very cautious.

Next, it should be followed by a meeting with the Americans ; that's the principle we endorsed before Alaska, it's a good thing. And I said – and it was approved by everyone – that we should be able to broaden it. Why ? Because we Europeans need, first of all, to be at the table, because we're the suppliers of security guarantees for Ukraine in the future and that's how we conceived it. It's also two European countries, the United Kingdom and France, that have been promoting this initiative since February. And secondly, Europeans' security is at stake, because unless we can properly contain Russia's army, Russia's power, its ballistic and nuclear capability but [also] the volume of its army today – which I remind you is 1.3 million strong – it's our security that will be directly concerned. And what I've wanted to do for several years now is to put Europe back at the table – Europe, which during the Cold War was a subject of discussion but which has never built its own security architecture. That security architecture has been shattered in recent years, not only through the war in Ukraine and the Russian war of aggression. It's also been shattered because the various treaties on which our security was structured, which limited the arms race, have either not been respected by some or have been torn up by others. So we must rebuild all that. All that work will be done after the Ukraine conflict. That's why the Europeans must be at the table.

Q. – Following the meeting in Alaska, Donald Trump has seemed to stop making the ceasefire a precondition to a peace agreement and has started to emphasize a peace agreement. Do you get the feeling, after your discussions today, that you've brought him back round to your interpretation of the issue ?

THE PRESIDENT – No – well, we're not going to reverse roles. We Europeans have always said we want a robust, sustainable peace agreement. It was the United States of America that asked for a ceasefire in February. Our fear was that it would not be followed by a lasting peace, and so that's why we said “security guarantees”. Ukraine agreed to the principle of a ceasefire. Since March, it's been Russia that has rejected it. What happened in Anchorage ? Russia said once again : we reject a ceasefire. But President Trump was convinced he could secure a peace treaty quickly with President Putin. Events will show us. I simply think he's now convinced, and President Putin has repeated it to him ; we've all reiterated to him that you can't discuss a peace treaty – which, after all, takes several days or even several weeks – while bombs are falling. And he himself has also expressed, several times, a humanitarian desire to stop the killing and stop what's happening against civilians, and so in this regard there was also a need, precisely, to have a truce.

Q. – The newspaper The Financial Times this afternoon published an article saying the Ukrainians were offering to buy \$100 billion of US military equipment as a condition, as it were, for American security guarantees. Is that something that was discussed today, those massive purchases ?

THE PRESIDENT – No. That wasn't discussed at all, we're a very long way from that. In any case, things are simple : the day there are security guarantees to build, we will need people to provide them first of all, armies, training capabilities, and then, on the equipment, everyone will have a contribution to make. There will also be the Russian contribution – it's also part of a peace treaty – to the reconstruction of Ukraine and its army. So all these are parameters that are not yet being discussed, we're a very long way from that.

Q. – You were talking of sanctions ; did Donald Trump confirm to you that he was in favour of them if Vladimir Putin still refused to engage in a peace process ?

THE PRESIDENT – His intention, as you’ve understood, is not necessarily to impose them, even though he has imposed what are called secondary sanctions on India and [on] what India is doing in particular in terms of buying and refining Russian oil, and we believe that’s had a great impact. So I think his intention is to engage, he very genuinely thinks we can get a result there, but the discussion dealt precisely with the possibility of a result not being achieved, the possibility of Russia not sincerely wanting to engage in such a process, and at that point he signalled his desire and his willingness to impose what he calls primary and secondary sanctions, but which are actually what we ourselves call sanctions, which we have imposed.

Q. – If Vladimir Putin’s response to what happened today is more drones and missiles raining down on Ukraine, what must the response to him be ?

THE PRESIDENT – I said this to President Trump earlier in the Oval Office, when we spoke afterwards. Several of us told him, “While you were speaking to President Putin, he was bombing Ukraine”. So first, this shows the need to stop the massacres, the need for a truce. And it also shows that there comes a time when actions reveal true intentions.

That’s it. In actual fact, Russia is continuing the war and intensifying it. It is waging a war against Ukrainian civilians as well and has given no sign of sincerely wanting peace. And our experience with Mr Putin and his approach over the past 15 years has shown us that whenever he can win through war – or thinks he can – he does not negotiate peace. That’s the reality. That is why I am saying now, as I said yesterday, that you have a US President, European Presidents, and a Ukrainian President who want peace. I myself have very serious doubts about how realistic the Russian President’s desire for peace is, because as long as he thinks he can win the war, he will continue to fight, and his final goal is to capture the maximum amount of territory, to weaken Ukraine, and to have a Ukraine that is either not viable on its own or is within the Russian fold. This is fairly obvious to everyone. And so our goal is simple : to achieve peace as swiftly as possible, to enforce international law and ensure Ukrainian sovereignty, for Ukraine to lose the least possible amount of territory, and especially to help Ukraine resist any new aggression. To have a Ukraine that has chosen Europe and can freely continue doing so, and to guarantee the security of Europeans. It is those famous security guarantees that we need for Ukraine now and in the future, and for us Europeans, because it is our security that is at stake there.

Q. – You made security guarantees a priority before you came. President Trump said he was ready to commit to that, and this evening he is even saying he’s ready to coordinate them. In very concrete terms, what does that mean ? What concrete commitments are you waiting for from the United States for these security guarantees ?

THE PRESIDENT – First of all, as I say, we made progress, but I’ll still be very cautious because all this is extremely complex, full of details, and we must work on the material side of things. I’m saying to you that, as I said earlier, we’ve worked on the security guarantees, work has been under way since February, coordinated by the British and French chiefs of staff. It’s about the format of a Ukrainian army that can resist and even deter any Russian aggression, in other words an army of several hundred thousand men that we’re going to have to equip, train and maintain in the long term. It’s also about reassurance forces that the allies are ready to supply – sea, land and air – and which, in certain areas, guarantee precisely that there will be no intrusion, which are not hot zones. The goal of these reassurance forces is not to be guarantors of peacekeeping operations, they’re not forces that will hold the border, but they signal strategic support and will maintain that in the long term. So we worked on all that ; we have the content. I can say what...

Q. – What does that mean about the US contribution ?

THE PRESIDENT – Well, I can’t answer that because we are starting the work tomorrow.

Q. – What are you expecting ?

THE PRESIDENT – That the United States will do everything it can, because this will help us lighten the European load, and that the United States will provide their guarantee as well, because that was the big question for many European colleagues – because this discussion actually began in February 2024 in Paris when I said that we should recreate strategic ambiguity. Therefore, we started this discussion well before the Coalition of the Willing, and the stumbling block for many partners was knowing what the Americans would do. Because it was important to know if the Americans were committed to this type of an operation. In recent days, the Americans clearly showed their readiness and willingness to rejoin this Coalition, or in any case to work with the Coalition of the Willing and to work on security guarantees.

Q. – By limiting Article 5 ?

THE PRESIDENT – First of all, I think you have to be careful, Article 5 is peculiar to NATO, which is an organization. We know the United States itself has said it doesn't want the Ukrainians to join NATO. Secondly, there's nothing automatic about it, as the US President pointed out about Article 5. I think we must be very cautious, and we must be very cautious because we owe it to the Ukrainians and we owe it to ourselves. You know, everyone has forgotten, but Ukraine was a great nuclear power. The international community persuaded it to relinquish its nuclear weapons in 1994, in a Budapest agreement where Russia, as I reminded President Trump earlier, pledged in writing never to attack Ukraine. So I'm saying this to show that Russia's non-aggression commitments are worthless. It wrote it, it signed it, it ratified it in 2004 ; it did the opposite 10 years later. But the second thing that the primary signatories, the UK and the US, agreed upon – and then France, even though we weren't one of the agreement's primary signatories – was that in the event of an attack, we would activate the Security Council's security and solidarity mechanisms. I think everyone saw in 2014 that there wasn't so much reality in that. So now the Ukrainians need not a declaration of principle, they need substance. And it's what we owe them if we want these security guarantees to be a reality. That's why I won't go into legal niceties. I think it's a very military issue. It's an issue that requires a serious and robust approach. And that's what has been prepared by our chiefs of staff. In any case, it's a commitment to work, it's a desire to participate in these security guarantees – which was not the case before – and to work on it ; we're starting tomorrow. I'll tell you at close of play.

Q. – A word about the surrender of Ukrainian territories. What did Donald Trump say to you about that ?

THE PRESIDENT – We didn't talk about that at all today. And for two reasons : firstly, because we said the priority is security guarantees. Secondly, we said it must be discussed bilaterally and trilaterally.

Thank you very much. Thank you, good luck, we're carrying on. It's far from over, as you've understood.