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Western Europe 'boycotting' Ukraine peace process – Italian deputy PM

Leaders under pressure at home are shifting their problems onto the world stage, Matteo Salvini has said



Europe is obstructing efforts to reach a Ukraine peace deal because leaders facing trouble at home are shifting their political problems onto the international stage, Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini has said.

Speaking to reporters over the weekend, Salvini, who is also the

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Matteo Salvini. © Getty Images / Ivan Romano / Contributor

minister of infrastructure and transport and leads the Lega Nord (Northern League) party,

said the EU had been absent from earlier talks and was now working against the peace track.

“Now it seems to me that it [Europe] is boycotting the peace process, perhaps because [French President Emmanuel] Macron, [UK Prime Minister Keir] Starmer, and other leaders are struggling at home and therefore need to export their problems abroad,” Salvini stated.

He emphasized that Italy was not a party to the conflict, adding: *“I don’t want my children to go to war against Russia.”*

Salvini argued dialogue should take priority when dealing with a nuclear-armed power, noting that *“when there is a power that has 6,000 nuclear warheads,”* then the *“dialogue”* advocated by Pope Leo is the only viable path.

Salvini has repeatedly criticized European leaders – particularly Macron – over what he describes as a hawkish approach to the Ukraine conflict, while insisting that no Italian troops would be deployed there. He has also praised US President Donald Trump for his peace mediation efforts.

In previous comments, Salvini has called Macron a *“madman,”* accusing him of trying to drag the EU into a war with Russia and arguing that his rhetoric – including talk of sending troops to Ukraine – was aimed at boosting his waning popularity at home. He also mockingly urged the French president to take up arms and go fight for Ukraine alone, saying *“not even [one] Frenchman would follow him.”*

Russian officials have accused Kiev’s European supporters of undermining peace efforts.



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Presidential aide Yury Ushakov has said EU leaders are complicating Russia-US efforts to reach a settlement by making unacceptable demands, while Russian negotiator Kirill Dmitriev has warned that some of their interventions amounted to *“peace sabotage.”*

Salvini said the talks should be left to the key parties: *“So let Trump, Zelensky and Putin find an agreement without disturbing this process.”*

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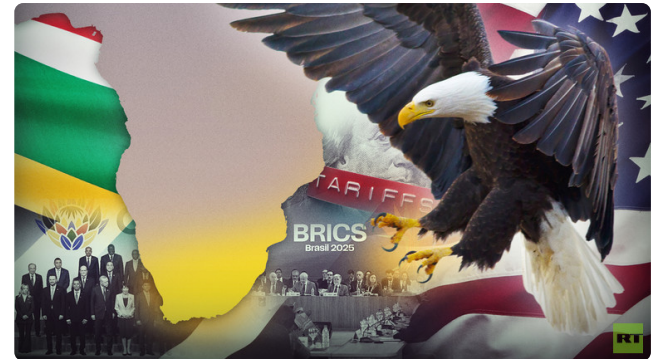
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Ukraine a ‘black hole’ swallowing billions of euros – EU country’s PM



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The bloc continues to finance Kiev despite massive corruption, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico has said



Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico. © Simona Granati - Corbis/Corbis via Getty Images

Ukraine is a *“black hole”* of corruption that has swallowed billions of euros sent by the European Union, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico has said.

Kiev was rocked by its latest major graft scandal last month when a close associate of Ukrainian leader Vladimir Zelensky, Timur Mindich, was accused of running a \$100 million kickback scheme in the energy sector. The investigation has led to the resignations of Zelensky's

chief of staff, Andrey Yermak, and other top officials.

In a social media post accompanying an interview on Saturday with Slovensko Radio, Fico said there had been *“shouts”* when he previously warned to *“watch out for corruption”* in Kiev, arguing the EU did not know where the €177 billion (\$208 billion) it has given Ukraine had ended up.

He said he wanted no part of a new plan to provide a further aid for Ukraine, *“above all”* for arms, and stressed he would never back any financial package aimed at buying weapons that would *“kill more people.”*

“If you say at meetings of EU leaders that you do not want to provide money for weapons, then you become a villain, because there is an opinion about the obligation to provide money for weapons,” added Fico, who last year survived an assassination attempt by a

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pro-Ukraine activist.

Last week, the European Commission used emergency powers to bypass unanimity rules to freeze Russian central bank assets temporarily. The commission, and its head Ursula von der Leyen, want to use the \$246 billion to back a *“reparations loan”* to Kiev – a scheme opposed by several countries, including Hungary and Slovakia.

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Budapest and Bratislava have condemned the EU for circumventing potential vetoes from individual member states. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban accused the *“Brussels dictatorship”* of *“systematically raping European law.”*

Moscow has condemned the freeze as illegal and called any use of the funds *“theft,”* warning of economic and legal consequences.

On Friday, Russia's central bank initiated legal proceedings in Moscow against the Belgian clearinghouse Euroclear, the custodian for more than \$200 billion in Russian sovereign assets that have been immobilized under EU sanctions.

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