



## Statement by President von der Leyen on Peace Discussions for Ukraine

Johannesburg, 23 November 2025

Ukraine has been at the heart of many discussions over the past days.

Any credible and sustainable peace plan should first and foremost stop the killing and end the war, while not sowing the seeds for a future conflict. We have agreed on the main elements necessary for a just and lasting peace and Ukraine's sovereignty.

Let me highlight three of them.

First, borders cannot be changed by force.

Second, as a sovereign nation there cannot be limitations on Ukraine's armed forces that would leave the country vulnerable to future attack and thereby also undermining European security.

Third, the centrality of the European Union in securing peace for Ukraine must be fully reflected.

Ukraine must have the freedom and sovereign right to choose its own destiny. They have chosen a European destiny. It starts with the country's reconstruction, its integration into our Single Market and our defence industrial base, and ultimately, joining our Union.

We will continue our work together with Ukraine, our Member States, the Coalition of the Willing and the US to make real progress towards peace.

What is important is that we move forward as partners, on a single track. And I want to end on a point that is personally important to me.

A crucial element that must be part of any agreement.

The return of each and every Ukrainian child abducted by Russia. Of all the horrors unleashed by Russia's war, none cuts deeper than this. Tens of thousands of boys and girls remain trapped in Russia. Frightened and longing for their loved ones. We must place these children at the top of the global agenda.

This is why together with Ukraine and Canada, we will co-host a Summit of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian children. We will not rest until every single one of them is reunited with their families, in their homes, where they belong.

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