EUROPE EXPLAINED

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TOP STORY • UKRAINE

Europe Waits Outside the Room as Abu Dhabi Talks End With a Prisoner Deal

Russia's negotiator asked why Europeans were there at all; the story now moves to Dublin.

Written and fact-checked by AI · News Pebbles

When Russian, Ukrainian and American negotiators sat down in Abu Dhabi this week, officials from European governments, the EU and NATO were in the same city but not at the same table. They consulted the Ukrainian and American teams separately. The three-way talks ended on Wednesday with an agreement in principle on a major exchange of prisoners of war, and no progress on a ceasefire or territory.

Russia made clear it wants to keep things that way. Its chief negotiator, Vladimir Medinsky, said Moscow had received no concrete European peace proposals. "We don't really understand in what capacity they are here," he said.

Kyiv and Washington see it differently. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said European security cannot be considered "without Europe." American officials have indicated that European countries should eventually join the negotiations, particularly on future security arrangements.

The next scene is on European soil. Zelenskyy landed in Ireland on Wednesday and met the Taoiseach, Ireland's prime minister, Micheál Martin, who said Ukraine's future "is in the European Union." On Thursday the European Political Community summit meets at the Convention Centre Dublin, and US envoys Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff are due there to brief Zelenskyy after first seeing President Vladimir Putin in Moscow.

FROM THE GULF TO DUBLIN



After Abu Dhabi, the diplomacy moves to Ireland, where European leaders gather on Thursday.

WHY THIS MATTERS

US officials say they want to settle the war and Europe's security arrangements together. Whether Europeans help write them is now an open question.

*New to this story? Catch up with **The story so far** on Read & Play.*

WORLD • CLIMATE

Most of Europe's Big Leaders Skip COP31; Finland Arrives With a Plan

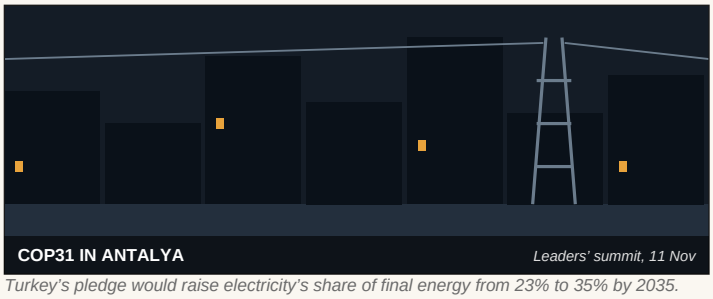
The EU says the summit's electricity pledge must be "clean" before it will sign.

The leaders' days at a UN climate summit are a kind of roll call, and at COP31 in Antalya, Turkey, several European names were missing. French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni did not attend. Britain's Andy Burnham was the only leader of a G7 country scheduled to address the summit. Campaigners handed their mock "Fossil of the Day" award to several European countries, Japan and Canada for staying away.

Those who did speak heard a blunt farewell from António Guterres, who steps down as UN Secretary-General in December. Fossil fuels, he said, "must go the way of the dinosaurs, but that won't happen on its own." He added that three-quarters of people live in countries that import fossil fuels. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen also spoke, though activists criticised her for not naming fossil fuels.

One European government came with specifics. Finland published a plan to move its electricity and district heating fully to low-carbon sources "by the 2030s"; nuclear power already provides almost 40% of its generation. France, Germany and the Netherlands have published plans of their own.

The summit's host has a different headline idea: a voluntary pledge to lift electricity from 23% of the world's final energy consumption to 35% by 2035. Germany, Norway and Finland are among its backers. The EU and the UK welcomed the focus but have not signed, with the EU stressing that electrification must be "clean", because the pledge does not specify how the power is generated. Among the absent was US President Donald Trump, who pulled his country out of the Paris Agreement. The talks run until 20 November.



COP31 IN ANTALYA *Leaders' summit, 11 Nov*

Turkey's pledge would raise electricity's share of final energy from 23% to 35% by 2035.

CONNECT THE DOTS

Economics: Guterres's point about importers applies to Europe. Countries that buy their oil and gas abroad are exposed to price shocks, which is one argument made for electrification.

UNITED KINGDOM • TRANSPORT

Will Britain Slow Its Switch to Electric Cars? “No Decision,” Says Burnham

Reports say the 2030 sales target could fall from 80% to about 60%.

Since January 2024 a law called the Zero Emission Vehicle mandate has told carmakers what share of the new cars they sell in Britain must be electric. The share rises each year, from 22% in 2024 to 80% by 2030, and firms that miss their target without using the scheme’s flexibilities face significant financial penalties.

Sales have not kept pace. Battery electric cars made up 26.6% of new registrations from January to October, against a headline target of 33% this year. The industry body, the SMMT, says the mandate runs ahead of natural demand. The Guardian reported that the 2030 target would be cut by about a quarter, to roughly 60%.

Prime Minister Andy Burnham called the reports “speculation” and said no decision had been made. Campaigners object in advance: Ben Plowden of the Campaign for Better Transport said weakening the mandate would be a “major setback” for cutting transport emissions.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The mandate decides what is on sale in British showrooms for the rest of the decade, and it is a test of how firmly a government holds to a climate rule when an industry pushes back.

Also in United Kingdom

• Armistice Day: The UK fell silent for two minutes at 11:00 on 11 November; Defence Secretary Wes Streeting laid a wreath at the Cenotaph.

• Climate: Burnham was due to attend the COP31 summit in Antalya, his first as Prime Minister.

ONE-LINE BRIEFS

• United States: Consumer prices rose 0.4% in October, above the 0.3% economists expected, and traders now see an 84% chance of an interest rate rise in December.

• Climate science: The Global Carbon Budget projects fossil fuel CO2 emissions will fall 0.4% worldwide in 2026, and 1.5% in the EU.

VOCABULARY BUILDER

Words that unlock today's news

Unanimity
Agreement by every member, with nobody against. Today: the EU budget and Ukraine aid both require unanimity.

Veto
The power of one member to block a decision. Today: Slovakia’s Robert Fico threatened to use his veto.

Mandate
An official order or requirement. Today: the ZEV mandate sets electric car sales targets for manufacturers.

Envoy
A person sent to represent a government. Today: US envoys Kushner and Witkoff are due in Dublin.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Armistice that ended the fighting in World War One began at 11:00 on 11 November 1918, which is why the UK’s two-minute silence is held at that hour.

EUROPE • EU BUDGET

Four Countries Defy Merz as He Ties the EU Budget to Money for Ukraine

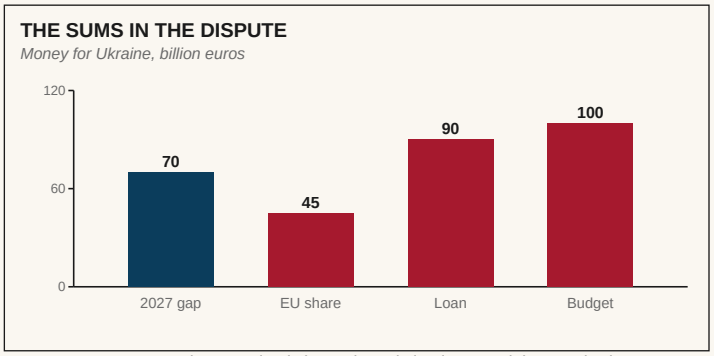
Slovakia’s leader calls the German chancellor’s letter “a textbook case of blackmail”.

Two of the EU’s biggest decisions share one rule: both its long-term budget and its aid to Ukraine need unanimity. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has now joined the two. In a letter to European Council President António Costa, he called fresh Ukraine aid an “essential prerequisite” for approving the next budget, which covers 2028 to 2034.

The sums are large. Kyiv faces a shortfall of 70 billion euros next year, and Brussels has promised to cover roughly 45 billion of it, most likely through new joint debt. An existing loan is worth 90 billion euros.

Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Bulgaria objected. Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico threatened a veto. Hungary’s Péter Magyar said its deficit rules out fresh EU-level debt. Czech leader Andrej Babiš noted the next budget already earmarks 100 billion euros for Ukraine, available from 2028.

Costa has promised a wide discussion at an informal leaders’ meeting in Dublin on 13 November, before a special summit in Brussels on 26-27 November.



Next year’s gap, Brussels’s promised share, the existing loan, and the next budget’s earmark.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Unanimity gives the smallest member the same blocking power as the largest, so one dispute can hold up both decisions.

THINK LIKE AN ANALYST

Is linking two decisions a fair way to win agreement? Who has more leverage: the biggest payer, or a country that can say no?

SPORTS CORNER

CRICKET: 249 AND STILL TOGETHER

Sri Lanka’s **Dhananjaya de Silva (167 not out)** and **Kusal Mendis (117)** put on 249 runs without being separated in the first Test in Rawalpindi. Sri Lanka closed day three on 404 for 4, 30 behind Pakistan.

WHAT TO WATCH NEXT

• Dublin: what European leaders say about Ukraine at Thursday’s summit.

• London: any decision on the 2030 electric car target.

“Being in the same city is not the same as being at the same table.”

You are not just reading the news — you are learning to think about it. See you in two days.