News



U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin talk Aug. 15, 2025, after they arrived at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska, for talks about bringing an end to the war in Ukraine. (OSV News/Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)



by Jonathan Luxmoore

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The mood among Ukraine's embattled Catholics remains distrustful and wary as Western leaders continue to debate how to end the war with Russia after President Donald Trump's Aug. 15 summit with Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

"At a time of great human fallibility, we're hoping and praying God may give reason and understanding to the politicians," said Ukrainian Bishop Stanislav Shyrokoradiuk of Odesa-Simferopol. "But this new embrace of Putin, who's killed and is still killing, causes deep unease here. By rolling out a red carpet for him, the American president gives the impression he's ready to make deals with the devil."

The diocesan bishop spoke with the National Catholic Reporter as heads of government from the European Union's 27 member-states discussed a possible peace settlement, and as energy facilities and apartment blocks in his southern port city were smashed in a new overnight Russian attack.

Shyrokoradiuk said Ukrainian civilians, children included, had been killed in their homes by Russian drones and missiles as Putin held talks with Trump, deepening doubts about the latest diplomatic efforts.

Related: Pope marks Ukraine's Independence Day with prayers for peace



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, center, meets some of the European leaders at the Ukrainian Embassy ahead of their meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington Aug. 18, 2025. (OSV News/Italian Prime Ministry handout via Reuters)

White House talks on Aug. 18 between Trump and eight European leaders, including Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, raised hopes that Western governments were "finally waking up to current threats," Shyrokoradiuk said.

But, the bishop said, many Ukrainians remained fearful that U.S. policy reflects "foreign business interests as much as concern for their country's future."

"The U.S. president has at least, thank God, modified his earlier statements, blaming Ukraine for the war," Shyrokoradiuk said.

The bishop said he hopes Trump will wield U.S. moral authority and defend democracy and freedom. "I hope America's senators and congress members will ensure he doesn't just decide everything by himself."

Media across Europe have expressed doubts about peace initiatives following the Trump-Putin summit, with analysts highlighting the obstacles to proposed security guarantees for Ukraine, and to any trilateral meeting between Trump, Putin and Zelenskyy.

The pope, who requested prayers on Aug. 17 that the "common good of peoples" would take priority in peace negotiations, has urged Catholics to mark the Aug. 22 feast of Mary Queen of Peace by praying and fasting to "dry the tears" of those suffer from armed conflicts, especially in Ukraine and the Holy Land.

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Ukraine's Greek Catholic primate said citizens were grateful to those now "exerting unprecedented international pressure."

Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk said in an Aug. 17 national message, "Ukraine is not just a territory. Talking about ending the war, reducing everything to the issue of territories, their exchange, or recognition of temporarily occupied lands, is extremely insufficient. Ukraine is people. Ukraine is a nation."

On Aug. 15, Russia's Orthodox patriarch, Kirill, praised Trump for being open to talks with Russia, adding that his "presence of goodwill" with Putin sent "a very important signal for all" that Russia and the U.S. could become "allies and equal participants in a dialogue, intellectual and practical, political and cultural."

However, the head of Ukraine's independent Orthodox church urged Ukrainians to have confidence "the Kremlin tyrant and his evil empire" would sooner or later fall and "perish in disgrace."

"We have read in the Bible and know … how powerful, but wicked and sinful rulers were overthrown from their thrones, how seemingly invincible armies were defeated," Metropolitan Epiphanius (Dumenko) said in an Aug. 17 sermon in Kyiv. "Where is the power of the pharaohs? Where is great Babylon? ... Have we not already witnessed how the godless Soviet Union, a prison of nations built on lies and bloodshed, fell in disgrace?"



Residents are seen at a site of an apartment building in Odesa, Ukraine, March 4, 2025, hit by a Russian drone strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine. (OSV News/Reuters/Nina Liashonok)

Shyrokoradiuk told NCR that Ukrainians were grateful to Western Catholics for support. He noted that Russia was already exploiting Putin's return from international isolation, and said he also counted on Catholics to provide political support to his war-torn country.

"Putin the evildoer is now receiving warm handshakes, with expressions of trust and confidence, before the eyes of the whole world — there's a diabolical element to this, which people aren't sure how to react to," the Odesa-Simferopol bishop said.

"Meanwhile, rockets are still flying all night, wrecking our food, water and fuel supplies, as we hold out, try to defend ourselves, and ensure life continues."