

Newsweek

Ukraine Gets Desperately Needed Artillery Boost in War With Russia

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The European Union (EU) and United States on Monday announced major ammunition assistance for the Ukrainian military.

The EU proposal originally pushed by its foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, was reportedly approved by 18 member nations and will deliver 1 million rounds of 155-millimeter artillery ammunition to Ukraine within the next 12 months.

Prior to the February 24 one-year anniversary of the war with Russia, Borrell was adamant about providing more ammunition for Ukraine. He called it "the most urgent issue" during a previous gathering of EU foreign ministers, adding that "if we fail on that, the result of the war is in danger."

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) on Monday announced a new \$350 million security package consisting of 155-millimeter artillery rounds for HIMARS (High-Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems), high-speed anti-radiation missiles (HARMs), howitzers, 81-millimeter and 60-millimeter mortar systems and rounds, grenade launchers, small arms, riverine boats and heavy fuel tankers, etc.

European Union Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell (left) shakes hands with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky prior the start of an EU leaders summit at the European Council headquarters on February 9, 2023, in Brussels, Belgium. On Monday, the EU announced a 1 million-shell ammunition package for the Ukrainian military.

The new EU initiative comes amid concerns expressed by NATO countries about their own stockpiles should a larger battle overtake Europe.

Borrell called the agreement "a historic decision" to be implemented via a three-pronged approach: 1 billion euros for immediate delivery; 1 billion Euros for joint procurement; and a commission put in place to ramp up production.

The European Defense Agency (EDA) project allows EU member states and Norway to proceed along two paths: a two-year, fast-track procedure for artillery rounds, and a seven-year project to acquire multiple ammunition types.

Countries that signed on to the EDA are Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden.

More member states have already expressed their intent to join the initiative soon following national procedures, the EU said in a press release, adding that common procurement "is the best option to achieve cost reduction from economies of scale while allowing member states to purchase ammunition according to their national needs and supporting Ukraine."

"Today, we take a step forward," Borrell said in a statement. "We are delivering on our promises to provide Ukraine with more artillery ammunition. ... The Ukrainian authorities have been clear about their needs and this EDA project is part of the EU response.

"By procuring together through the EDA framework and mobilizing financial support from the European Peace Facility, we will deliver to Ukraine more and faster. We are again breaking a taboo and unlocking the potential of EU cooperation in joint procurement."

Ukraine Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba tweeted that he anticipates "the swift adoption of big decisions which will bolster Ukraine's capabilities on the battlefield."

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas tweeted her support for the agreement.

"#Ukraine needs ammunition and has asked for it. ... Glad that EU foreign and defence ministers approved the initiative today," she wrote. "This helps to ramp up European defence industry and boost our security."

German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius described it as "new territory" for the EU, according to *The Guardian*.

"Our goal has to be to ship a significant amount of munitions to Ukraine before the end of this year," Pistorius said.

An EU spokesperson told *Newsweek* it had nothing to add to Borrell's remarks.

In the U.S., Monday's announcement marks the DoD's 34th inventory drawdown since August 2021.

"We applaud the more than 50 countries that have come together to provide support for Ukraine as it defends its sovereignty and territorial integrity," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. "Russia alone could end its war today. Until Russia does we will stand united with Ukraine for as long as it takes."

Pentagon spokesperson Garron Garn commended the "incredible solidarity" by the 40-plus nations who have militarily supported Ukraine since the war began.

"We are working around the clock to fulfill Ukraine's priority security assistance requests, delivering weapons from U.S. stocks when they are available, and facilitating the delivery of weapons by allies and partners when their systems better suit Ukraine's needs," Garn told *Newsweek* in an email. "At every point of this conflict, we have been focused on getting the Ukrainians what they need, depending on the conditions of the battlefield."

"We have seen Ukraine's frontline units effectively employing security assistance at a large scale every day on the battlefield as they defend their country against Russian aggression."

Jordan Cohen, policy analyst at the Cato Institute, told *Newsweek* in an email that 1 million shells divided across the entire EU for a 12-month period "is not that much" considering estimates of tens of thousands of shells fired monthly.

Although questions exist about whether the ammunition should provide "more than a few months of cover," he said it's likely the best use of the EU's money.

"Ukraine needs to protect its territory from Russian long-range strikes, and artillery and ammunition is their way around that problem," Cohen said. "By allowing Ukraine to fight at longer distances, artillery and ammunition have allowed Ukrainian soldiers to defend territory."

Newsweek reached out to the Ukrainian and German defense ministries by email for comment.