



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is pictured with Pope Francis during a private audience at the Vatican in this Feb. 8, 2020, file photo. (CNS photo/Gregorio Borgia, Reuters pool)

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A popular blog that closely monitors the Vatican has reported that Pope Francis wants to send envoys to Moscow and Kyiv to begin discussions about achieving a truce.

The blog, Il Sismografo, reported May 18 that Presidents Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine and Vladimir Putin of Russia "each agreed to talks with the Holy Father's two special envoys to discuss and achieve a truce."

Several Vatican officials who would be expected to have information about the papal initiative told Catholic News Service May 18 either that they had no information or that they were awaiting further developments.

The Vatican press office said it could not confirm the mission.

"At this junction," Sismografo wrote, "there are preliminary agreements on the names" of Bologna Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, president of the Italian bishops' conference, as the papal envoy to Kyiv, and Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, the Russian-speaking prefect of the Dicastery for Eastern Churches, as papal envoy to Moscow.

"But it has not been confirmed that these names are definitive," the blog reported. "Both must still be approved."

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Sismografo did not provide an explanation for the thinking behind sending different envoys to the two capitals.

Returning to Rome from Budapest, Hungary, April 30, Francis told reporters he had a peace mission underway, but could not provide details. Sismografo said the pope was referring to his plan to send envoys to speak with Zelenskyy and Putin.

Spokesmen for the Ukrainian and Russian governments denied knowing anything about the pope's plan, although Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, insisted they had been informed.

Then, Francis met May 3 at the Vatican with Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, head of external church relations for the Moscow Patriarchate. The Orthodox leader also met with Gugerotti.

And the pope met May 13 at the Vatican with Zelenskyy, who tweeted that he asked the pope "to condemn Russian crimes in Ukraine. Because there can be no equality between the victim and the aggressor." The Ukrainian leader also said he reiterated his insistence on a "just peace" that involves Russia leaving Ukrainian territory.

All of which led Sismografo to conclude May 18, "At this point it seems likely that, for now, the 'mission' is bogged down."