



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on June 19, 2023

EU Chief: Putin Waiting till 2024 U.S. Elections Before Starting Peace Talks

The Kremlin could be awaiting a potential change of leadership in the White House before it kickstarts peace negotiations about the Russo-Ukrainian crisis, according to a recent [interview](#) by European Commission Vice-President Josep Borrell with Spanish media. Borrell's interview came amid Russian President Vladimir Putin's [declaration](#) that Russia was not opposed to peace negotiations, unless the West continues to fund the Ukrainian resistance and deploy military arms to Ukraine.

During his interview, Borrell asserted that Russian actions in Ukraine would likely have been vastly different if former U.S. President Donald Trump were still in power, and also stated that Putin had greatly underestimated the tenacity of U.S.-EU ties.

Notwithstanding a [report](#) that Trump had no criminal links with the Russian government, the former U.S. president has been constantly castigated for having pro-Russian sympathies before and during his presidency.

In his interview, Borrell proceeded to lambast those who sought for quick peace solutions with Moscow without demanding that the Russians completely back off from Ukraine.

Earlier this month, Ukraine officially launched its much-awaited counteroffensive against Russia, with sources close to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky contending that Ukrainian forces had engaged in key battles against the Russian military. Additionally, Kyiv tried to destroy the land bridge connecting Russia with Crimea to undermine Russian supply routes.

In his revelations, Borrell said that the Chinese government might pressure Russia to align with Beijing's peace plans unveiled at the Munich Security Conference earlier this year.

China has attempted to position itself as a peace broker throughout the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, as the EU contemplates punitive measures against Chinese companies for their links to Russian war efforts in Ukraine. That being said, Beijing earned criticism from across Europe for a diplomatic faux pas that called the sovereignty of post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe into question. Besides, the Chinese have asked Western powers to stop deploying weapons to Ukraine and further provoking Russia.

Previously, the *South China Morning Post* reported that EU officials were gearing up to sanction eight key Chinese companies allegedly tied to Russian actions in Ukraine. The companies have been slammed for reselling European technology, primarily in the form of microchips used by Russian forces in Ukraine.



AP Images
Josep Borrell



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Regarding domestic politics in Spain, Borrell stated that any change of government in Madrid would not change the EU's commitment to Ukraine, affirming to his interviewer that the EU was keeping tabs on any potential Russian interference in next year's EU elections and any demands for a new Catalan independence referendum.

Since 2022, Borrell has featured prominently in the EU's response to the Russo-Ukrainian crisis and has helped mobilize various arms shipments to Ukraine as well as promote sanctions against the Russian government.

Despite widespread Western-led sanctions against Moscow, Putin highlighted in a speech at the plenary session of the 2023 St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) that Russia's unemployment rate has fallen to a historic low of 3.3 percent and its inflation rate has dropped to 2.9 percent — figures lower than in most Western countries. What is more, the Russian economy is scheduled to grow by 1.5 percent-two percent this year.

The fact that Borrell broached the topic of American presidential politics in his aforementioned Spanish news media interview has only added to rumors that the topic of Ukraine could become a prominent issue in next year's race for the White House.

Nonetheless, it is becoming more evident as the days go by that EU member states, in their punitive sanctions on Russia, have inadvertently hurt their own economies instead. For instance, German Economic Minister Robert Habeck (Greens) has voiced concerns over a possible cessation of Russian gas supplies, cautioning that Germany could be coerced in halting its industrial capacity as a result.

Habeck's somber remarks came amid the impending expiration of Russo-Ukrainian gas transit contracts that permit Russian natural gas to flow through Ukraine to ultimately reach countries such as Germany as well as other Central and Eastern European countries. Based on reports by the Berlin-based newspaper *Tagesspiegel*, such contracts are unlikely to be renewed, in light of worsening Russo-Ukrainian ties.

At the East German Economic Forum in Bad Saarow, Brandenburg, on June 12, Habeck proclaimed:

I just want to point out that the transit agreements that Russia has signed with Ukraine will expire in 2024. And the war is raging. There is no sure scenario for how things will turn out. If Russian gas were not to come to Eastern Europe at the rate it is still flowing through Ukraine, what was agreed upon at the European level would apply. Before people freeze there, [Germany] would be required to curb or even shut down our industry.

Since supranational EU laws oblige member states to supply gas to neighboring countries whose households or essential services such as hospitals face acute shortages, Germany would have to export gas to Central and Eastern Europe in the event of gas shortages. Consequently, Germany, Europe's largest economy, could be left with limited or no gas supplies, Habeck cautioned ominously.

Nevertheless, the Green politician asserted that the solution to a possible gas shortage in Germany would be to finish constructing the [LNG terminals](#) at the North Sea port of [Wilhelmshaven](#), to raise Germany's energy storage capacity and ensure the continuity of energy flows to Eastern Germany and Central and Eastern Europe.

At the moment, Germany's energy storage facilities are almost 80 percent full, the Green politician declared.



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While some gas deliveries are slated to continue beyond 2024, the volume would likely not be equivalent to what is currently being supplied, owing to weak political resolve in renewing Russo-Ukrainian contracts, as per a [report](#) by the Center on Global Energy Policy published earlier this month.

“Direct negotiations between Ukraine and Russia on the extension of the transit agreement seem highly unlikely in the current environment,” contended the report’s authors Anne-Sophie Corbeau and Tatiana Mitrova, who then elaborated that “reaching a new transit deal would require a totally different geopolitical environment.”



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