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Germany's Scholz Ready to Talk to Putin

On November 12, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz expressed his readiness for new talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict, while highlighting his stance that Moscow must make serious concessions to Kyiv to persuade it to come to the negotiating table.

In an interview with the German daily *Heilbronner Stimme*, Scholz alleged that Russia's action against Ukraine "is the return of imperialism in Europe," stating that Berlin plans to back Kyiv with weapons and other forms of assistance "as long as necessary."



AP Images
Olaf Scholz

Nonetheless, the German leader did not exclude the notion of diplomatic engagement with Russia, explaining that he had conducted talks with Putin in the past and was open to do so in the future. However, "negotiations [with Ukraine] require a decisive step from Russia," the chancellor said, calling for Russia to pull its troops out from territories Ukraine claims as its own.

The last time Scholz and Putin spoke by phone was in December 2022. At the time, the Russian leader opposed "the destructive policy of Western countries to pump the Kyiv regime with arms" and train Ukrainian military personnel. This support led Ukraine to dismiss any form of discussions with Russia, the Kremlin claimed.

For his part, Scholz indicated in June that he wanted to speak with Putin again but was informed by Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov that Putin had no such plans at the time.

Russia has insisted that it was open to negotiations with Ukraine. Nevertheless, last year, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky forbade any peace talks with Moscow's present leadership after four former Ukrainian regions overwhelmingly voted to join Russia, in what many in the West referred to as "sham elections."

Later, Zelensky touted his own peace formula, demanding that Russia withdraw all its troops from territories claimed by Ukraine, as well as urging for a tribunal to prosecute Moscow for alleged war crimes. Russia disavowed Zelensky's idea as unrealistic.

Scholz signaled he was open to talks with Russia after *Bild* reported on November 11 that the German government had agreed to double the amount of military aid to Ukraine from four to eight billion euros (\$4.3 to \$8.6 billion) in 2024. Russia has repeatedly cautioned the West against sending weapons, arguing that this will only drag the conflict on and make it a de facto participant in tensions.

In October this year, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder admitted to Germany's [Berliner Zeitung](#) newspaper that the U.S. government did not "allow" any compromises that could have ended the Russia-Ukrainian conflict just weeks after Moscow's military offensive began in February 2022.

In the interview, Schroeder said he was asked to mediate the March 2022 peace talks between Ukrainian and Russian officials in Istanbul. He said that although representatives of Zelensky were



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open to making concessions on topics such as abandoning attempts to join NATO, “the Ukrainians did not agree to peace because they were not allowed to. They first had to ask the Americans about everything they discussed.”

Russian officials have accused the United States and other Western backers of Ukraine of instructing the Zelensky regime against agreeing to a peace settlement with Russia. Schroeder, who has justified his friendship with Putin, basically verified such claims in his *Berliner Zeitung* interview. “My impression: Nothing could happen because everything else was decided in Washington,” he said.

The ex-chancellor characterized Washington’s approach as “fatal,” saying it led to closer ties between Russia and China. “The Americans believe they can keep the Russians down,” Schroeder said. “Now, it is the case that two actors, China and Russia, who are limited by the USA, are joining forces. Americans believe they are strong enough to keep both sides in check. In my humble opinion, this is a mistake. Just look how torn the American side is now. Look at the chaos in Congress.”

Also, Washington’s allies in Western Europe “failed” to grasp the chance to push for peace in March 2022, Schroeder said. At the time, Schroeder elaborated, Zelensky did not oppose compromise on Crimea and breakaway territories in the Donbass region. Since that time, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian troops have been killed as Western military aid prolongs the crisis. Putin estimated earlier this month that Kyiv had lost 90,000 soldiers since the much-hyped counteroffensive began in June.

“The arms deliveries are not a solution for eternity, but no one wants to talk,” Schroeder said. “Everyone is sitting in trenches. How many more people have to die? It’s a bit like the Middle East. Who are the victims on one side and on the other? Poor people who lose their children.”

Schroeder argued that only French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz could restart peace talks in Eastern Europe. “Scholz and Macron should actually support a peace process in Ukraine because it’s not just an American matter, but above all a European matter.” He added, “Why did Scholz and Macron not combine the arms deliveries with an offer to talk? Macron and Scholz are the only ones who can talk to Putin.”

The U.S. strategy to bring NATO to Moscow’s western border by adding Ukraine to the Western military alliance threatened Russia, Schroeder said. However, the German ex-chancellor claimed that one of the reasons for weaponizing Ukraine, that is, alleged Russian expansionism, were unfounded fears.

“This fear of the Russians coming is absurd,” Schroeder said. “How are they supposed to defeat NATO, let alone occupy Western Europe?” He continued, “That is why no one in Poland, the Baltics and certainly not in Germany — all NATO members, by the way — has to believe they are in danger.”

Furthermore, Schroeder posited that Western leaders should realize that regardless of who was at the helm in Moscow, Russia would not permit NATO to absorb either Ukraine or Georgia. “This threat analysis may be emotional, but it is real in Russia,” he said. “The West must understand this and accept compromises accordingly. Otherwise, peace will be difficult to achieve.”



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