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### War in Ukraine

## Gerhard Schröder says Russia wants negotiated end to Ukraine war

Germany ex-chancellor defends friendship with Vladimir Putin after trip to Moscow



Gerhard Schröder, pictured, has been harshly criticised over his links to Russia's president but says he has 'condemned the war many times' © Jens Schicke/Imago/Reuters

**Guy Chazan** in Berlin YESTERDAY

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Germany's former chancellor Gerhard Schröder has said after he visited Russian president Vladimir Putin in Moscow last week that the Kremlin is open to talks to end the war in Ukraine.

"The good news is that the Kremlin wants a negotiated solution," Schröder said in an interview with the German magazine Stern.

Schröder has been harshly criticised in recent months over his refusal to distance himself from Putin, a close friend, despite Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, and over his continuing links to Russian energy companies that are closely controlled by the Kremlin.

In a recent interview he defended the president over alleged Russian atrocities in Ukrainian towns such as Bucha, saying he did not think those orders would have come from the Kremlin.

Speaking to Stern he refused again to renounce his friendship with Putin. "I have condemned the war many times, you know that. But would it really help anyone if I were to personally distance myself from Vladimir Putin?" he asked.

Schröder added that remaining in touch with the Russian leader meant he could “still be useful”. He said he had received many letters from within Germany saying: “It’s a good thing there’s still someone keeping the channels of communication with Russia open in the current conflict.”

The Social Democrats are trying to kick the former chancellor out of the party, while in May he finally stepped down as chair of Rosneft, the state-owned Russian oil company, after weeks of pressure.

Schröder said the Kremlin was ready to negotiate an end to the war, pointing to the success of talks to restart Ukrainian grain exports via the Black Sea. “Perhaps one could gradually expand that into a ceasefire,” he said.

But the kind of settlement he said was possible reflected many of the Kremlin’s key preoccupations.

He said it would be a “big mistake” to dismiss possible concessions by Ukraine in advance as a “dictated peace”. The problems could be solved, he said, through a compromise for the eastern region of Donbas — based on a “Swiss canton model” — as well as “armed neutrality” for Ukraine as an alternative to Nato membership.

He also said Kyiv should surrender its claim to Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014. “The idea that the Ukrainian president [Volodymyr] Zelenskyy will reconquer Crimea militarily is just absurd,” he said.

Schröder also said Germany could avoid an energy crunch this winter by bringing the now-defunct Nord Stream 2 pipeline into service. As well as driving negotiations for the original Nord Stream pipeline, he later served as chair of the shareholder committee of Nord Stream AG.

“If things really get tight, there is this pipeline, and with both Nord Stream pipelines there would be no supply problem for German industry and for German households,” he said, describing NS2 as “ready”.

The former leader said Germany and France had a special responsibility to try to end the war in Ukraine. “Not enough is happening at the moment on that front, that’s my impression,” he said. “Because it’s clear that nothing will happen without talks.”

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