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Why are EU leaders suddenly being nice to Russia?

The German chancellor, French president and Italian prime minister appear to have seen reason in making up with Moscow. But is it genuine?



By **Tarik Cyril Amar**, a historian from Germany working at Koç University, Istanbul, on Russia, Ukraine, and Eastern Europe, the history of World War II, the cultural Cold War, and the politics of memory

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German Chancellor Friedrich Merz © Getty Images / Maja Hitij / Getty Images

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Sometimes a surprising statement made almost in passing on a minor occasion can pack a lot of political oomph. And sometimes, it's just a slip and won't tell you much about either the present or the future. But how do you know?

That is the challenge posed by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's recent – and very unusual – [talk about a “compromise”](#) (“*Ausgleich*” in German) with Russia, which, he also stressed, is “*a European country,*” indeed “*our greatest European neighbor.*”

Outside the context of current Western and, in particular, German and EU politics, such a statement may seem almost commonplace. *Obviously*, it would make sense for Berlin – and Brussels, too – to work toward a peaceful, productive, mutually beneficial relationship with Moscow. Equally obviously, this is not merely an option but, in reality, a vital necessity (as Merz may have been hinting at when emphasizing that Russia is Germany's greatest European neighbor: Greatest as in indispensable?).

Yet once you add the actual context of escalating German and EU policies toward Russia since 2014 at the very latest, Merz's sudden insight into the obvious appears almost sensational. For over a decade, German and EU policy toward Moscow has been based on three simple – and self-damagingly insane – ideas: First, Russia is our enemy by default and “*forever*” (see the refreshingly [frank admission](#) by German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepful). Second, using Ukraine (and a lot of Ukrainians), we can defeat that enemy with a combination of economic and diplomatic warfare and a very bloody proxy war on the ground. Finally, there is no alternative: it is VERBOTEN to even think about genuine give-and-take negotiations and any compromise that would also be good enough for Moscow.

Merz, moreover, has no record as a doubter of these moronic dogmas. On the contrary, he has been a consistent uber-hawk, combining the requisite constant Russophobic undertone with a long series of hardline initiatives and positions. Just a few months

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ago, for instance, Merz fought tooth and nail for confiscating Russian sovereign assets frozen in the EU. That he lost that fight was due to resistance from Belgium – which would have been exposed to absurdly irrational risks by permitting that robbery – and France and Italy, whose leaders tripped up their hapless German “ally” at the last minute.

In a similar combination of public belligerence and final futility, Merz had long been a proponent of delivering advanced German Taurus cruise missiles – particularly well-suited for destroying things such as Russia's Kerch Bridge – to Ukraine, before abandoning that awful idea. Ultimately and wisely, he shied away from involving Germany even more deeply in the proxy fight against Russia, most likely under the impression of very firm warnings from Moscow.



Read more: Germany's Merz changes stance on Russia

Just this month, the German chancellor declared he is ready to send German soldiers to secure a “ceasefire” in Ukraine. Yes, that would be that ceasefire that Moscow has ruled out as a dishonest half-measure. It is true that Merz hedged this announcement with conditions that make it irrelevant. But, nonetheless, it was not a contribution to de-escalation with Russia.

Yet here we are. Speaking not in Berlin, but the provincial metropolis of Halle in Eastern Germany, Merz used the occasion of a fairly humdrum meeting under the auspices of a regional IHK (Industrie und Handelskammer) meeting to speak about Germany's relationship with Russia.

The IHK is a chamber of industry and commerce, an economic association of some weight. But it is not the



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0:00 28:55    
- 

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0:00 22:9    

parliament in Berlin or, for instance, even a foreign-policy information war outfit/think tank. Most of [Merz's remarks](#), unsurprisingly, concerned the German economy, which, he had to admit, is not in a good state, but, he promised, will be better soon. He also gave his word [to fight and reduce bureaucracy](#), not only in Germany but the EU as well. That sort of stuff, nothing special, political potboiler.



But then, in the middle of the absolutely predictable and rather boring meeting, the chancellor suddenly extended a hand to Moscow.

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Or did he? Merz himself knows that his having anything to say

about Russia that comes without foam at the mouth is extraordinary: he took care to assure his listeners [that it was not the location "in the East"](#) (that is, the former East Germany) that made him strike such a new tone regarding Russia.

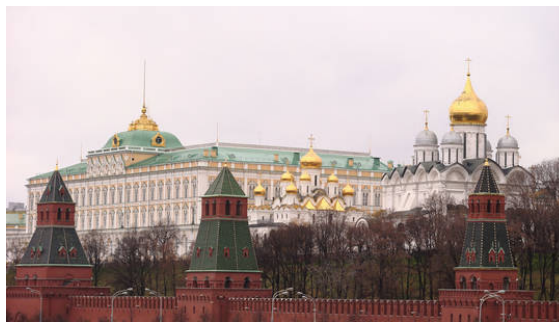
His audience may or may not have been convinced by that all-too-quick denial. Halle is not only a major city in Germany's East, but also, more specifically, the second-largest conurbation in the Land of Saxony-Anhalt. That is where, polls suggest, the new-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party may well win a crucial election in September, [particularly by outdistancing Merz's own mainstream conservatives \(CDU\)](#). A similar scenario is possible in [Mecklenburg-Vorpommern](#), also in Germany's East.

In both places, even a relative (not absolute) AfD majority, which seems certain at this point, would expose the traditional parties and especially the CDU to one of their worst nightmares: the end of the so-called *"firewall,"* that is, the harebrained and undemocratic policy of simply freezing the AfD out of

the building of ruling coalitions. Merz personally has been an iron proponent of the “*firewall*.” Razing it, even regionally, will cost him his political career or force him into a brutal, humiliating 180-degree turn.

One important reason voters in Germany’s East are unhappy with the traditional parties is their policy of relentless, self-damaging confrontation toward Russia and equally relentless, really masochistic support for Zelensky’s regime in Ukraine. Just now, one of Germany’s highest courts has finally, in essence, recognized the fact that Ukraine was deeply involved in the worst vital-infrastructure attack in postwar German history, [the destruction of most of the Nord Stream pipelines](#). Many Germans have had enough, not only but especially in Germany’s East.

That is why Merz knows that any apparent concessions to Moscow will meet healthy skepticism there. He also has a solid and well-deserved reputation for breaking his promises. His listeners in Halle may well have dismissed the new Merz sound as nothing but cheap pre-electoral manipulation.



Read more: [Kremlin welcomes European U-turn on talks with Russia](#)

And perhaps that is all it was. But there are good reasons to keep an open mind. For one thing, Merz has not been the only EU leader striking a more conciliatory note recently. [As the Russian government has noted](#), similar statements have been made in France and Italy. The leaders of both countries, Emmanuel Macron and Georgia Meloni, have been no less bold than Merz in stating the obvious, namely – to summarize – that not even talking to Moscow is a daft policy.

It is not hard to see why EU politicians may be prepared to pursue diplomacy again. Their imperial overlord in Washington has made it clear that the Ukraine war will be their problem and theirs alone, while also displaying a brutality towards the world, including the clients/vassals in Europe, that is unusually open even by American standards.

After the tariff wars, the new US National Security Strategy, Venezuela, and the threats against Denmark over Greenland, could it be that, at very long last, some in Europe are slowly waking up to the fact that the worst threat to the sorry remains of their sovereignty, their economies, and also their traditional political elites is Washington, not Moscow? It would be very rash to assume so. But we can hope.

The statements, views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of RT.



OPINION

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Kicky 1/18/2026 at 2:46 PM

0

Has anyone even considered that Russia would make a far better ally than America?.

[Reply](#)



Република Македонија

0

1/18/2026 at 8:50 AM

Trump is taking over Greenland for one purpose only- **get rid of NATO**, US is bankrupt as USSR was in 1990s, and it is a bell ring to wake up Europe take ownership of their destiny . And yes, it is brutal, unapologetic , but nevertheless less it is real. The cabal In City of London is infuriated , they are losing control.

[Reply](#)



Република Македонија

0

1/18/2026 at 8:45 AM

Never trust Greeks bearing gifts ...

[Reply](#)



Kristy 1/18/2026 at 3:41 AM

1

Because they learned they have nothing to fear from EACHOTHER, and they are both about to fight the same beasts of the earth 🌍❤️

[Reply](#)



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0

1/18/2026 at 1:48 AM

they run out of pills as armsterdam sent sam kor to brit neo nazi pharma factory

[Reply](#)

Q **QuadrillionExpress** 1/18/2026 at 12:51 AM 1

Russia stop messing around EU, reinforce relationships with them, meet with Venezuela too, and stop sucki g the terrorist Trump's 🤡 dirty asssssss! 🤢🤢🤢🤢🤢🤢🤢🤢🤢🤢

[Reply](#)

 **Roger Dodger** 1/17/2026 at 10:43 PM 2

He put his finger up in the hurricane to see which way the voters wind blows: Even the JWO banksters are unsure of themselves

[Reply](#)

Na **Na An** 1/17/2026 at 12:32 PM 6

It's never too late to wake up and discover the huge landmass next door with ocean of cheap energy and natural resources that will forever be there for hundreds if not thousands of years is your neighbor for good. Putin may come and go, but Russia will remain like it or not. Europe need to think for itself and not be subservient to USA demands and requests!

[Reply](#)

G **GeorgeBMac** 1/17/2026 at 1:38 PM ↑ 4

Do not confuse the «USA» with Trump. No other US president would dream of colonizing Greenland in a blatant attempt to steal its resources. Trump is, so far, an aberration — an aberration that will go away (unless he is able to rig future elections — which he and his shills on the Supreme Court have been working on).

[Reply](#)

G **Ghost Writer** 1/17/2026 at 2:24 PM ↑ 5

I predict he will be impeached and removed from office. He is a dangerous sociopath.

[Reply](#)

 **Mistle2000** 1/17/2026 at 6:59 PM ↑ 2


I am surprised some american patriot has not yet put a bullet in his head.

[Reply](#)

G **Ghost Writer** 1/17/2026 at 2:23 PM ↑ 0

Most of Russia is frozen year round.

[Reply](#)

 **Mistle2000** 1/17/2026 at 6:56 PM -2

they hear whispers that the Russian's patience is fast running out. Nuking the uk and germany would make europe a much safer place.

[Reply](#)

M **Misha Vlad** 1/17/2026 at 6:27 PM 1

How to tell if a politician is lying? His/her mouth & lips are moving and making a sound. Merz, Macron, Starmer (the Three-Stooges) and Sub-Three-Stooges: Queen Ursula, Zero-History-Boozer Kallas, and Warmonger Rutte are all the same, plus counting Rampant-Corrupt-Master Zelensky. Don't believe or trust any of them.

[Reply](#)

E **Edie Jones** 1/17/2026 at 5:58 PM 0

Western governements are Russia, and Russians enemies for over a century; EU is for many centuries. Russia and Russian should not trust the westerners at all; they will wait for time to attack again. Now these morons in EU realize that they been screwed nicely, and want to reco er their financial and economy as fast possible.

[Reply](#)

A **Arne** 1/17/2026 at 11:07 AM 2

EU and German economy is collapsing. That is why. UK and france isn't doing well either. Well. Actually no EU is doing fine.

[Reply](#)

K **Karl Heinz Goldberger** 0
1/17/2026 at 5:39 PM ↑

Right. But it is a self imposed problem. First, the

right. but it is a self imposed problem. First, the radical Green party has brought the German economy down, together with the red socialists. And now, after the elections, this guy teamed up with the socialists again and he is giving the German economy the final strike. When he (hopefully) leaves office in 2029, the German economy will be dead.

[Reply](#)

K Karl Heinz Goldberger

3

1/17/2026 at 5:36 PM

First of all, the German chancellor has lied just before the elections, he has lied soon after the elections and he has repeated lying to the German people. There is a pattern, and it consists of «lying to other people». Therefore, I don't believe a single word he is saying. He will do anything to stay in power, since he proved already, that he will do anything to clinch power.

[Reply](#)



koaquira 1/17/2026 at 5:23 PM

1

Being nice to Hitler, saying he was good because he fought Russia did not work.
Now, no other option than bow and beg.



[Reply](#)

F Francis Louis Szot 1/17/2026 at 4:01 PM

1

The question that needs to be answered first, before any serious & binding rapprochement between Russia and any members of NATO and/or the EU may begin, is how many decades of peaceful, predictable & reciprocal trust-building cooperation must pass before the Kremlin is finally convinced again that they are dealing with potential partners, instead of gaslighting, backstabbing, ideologically fanatic, imperialist maniacs. I'd guess a minimum of two, but that's an optimistic view. Hard, stoic realism is the only way to proceed. As for today, it's far too early.

[Reply](#)



Who Benefits 1/17/2026 at 2:36 PM

1

The Enemy of my Enemy is My Friend!

[Reply](#)

 **John_Wick** 1/17/2026 at 11:23 AM

2

Because the U.S. wants no trouble from Russia in Venezuela or possibly Greenland. Perhaps they want to cut a deal. Don't think Russia is silly enough to fall for their lies again.

[Reply](#)

 **Ghost Writer** 1/17/2026 at 2:25 PM ↕

1

Putin recently said that Russia is at war with the US. One of those red lines will finally set the war into motion.

[Reply](#)

 **Edwin** 1/17/2026 at 2:12 PM

-1

Wells congratulations seems the light at the end of the tunnel. God look what you are doing. Tons of blessings you will receive for making peace. You will see hope how your countries economy is grow. GodBless you all. Amen. Noahide. God7Laws.

[Reply](#)

 **Ghost Writer** 1/17/2026 at 2:22 PM ↕

1

Do you realize that breaking any of the Noahide laws carries death by beheading???

[Reply](#)

 **Ralph Griebenow** 1/17/2026 at 2:01 PM

1

Tariffs Amar here is on the ball, and asking the right questions, because for Europe, it's either be nice to Russia (a very EUROPEAN country indeed), or try take it by force (by war). Problem is, Putin knows this and will not succum to the latter — hell will literally freez over for them if they don't start becoming friendly.

[Reply](#)

 **No Reply** 1/17/2026 at 1:57 PM

1

They are all WEF, this is all part of Schwabs great Reset, and everyone is falling for it, east and west,

you shall own nothing but you shall be happy.

[Reply](#)



traffa2 1/17/2026 at 1:50 PM

3

Disband NATO. No more Junk technology arms purchases from the United States.

[Reply](#)



traffa2 1/17/2026 at 1:48 PM

4

Maybe they have realised that the United States is a far worse enemy than Russia.

[Reply](#)



GeorgeBMac 1/17/2026 at 1:35 PM

5

For four years Europeans have lived under the mantra of: «If We Don't Stop Russia in Ukraine, they will invade Europe».

But, today it is Trump who is openly threatening to invade Europe/Greenland and make it a US Colony.

THAT might be enough to change some minds about Russia — when they are faced with a real invasion rather than an excuse

[Reply](#)



W Daly 1/17/2026 at 11:20 AM

2

I'd never trust Merz who seems to detest the German people

[Reply](#)



Madrina 1/17/2026 at 11:13 AM

0

No one is nice.

When your arch enemy is under pressure and you are winning he will resort to any means to still get the better of you.

Sometimes I really doubt the capacity of the human mind.....every child knows this behavior and can practice it....just observe a school yard during break time...or try to at least remember your own childhood or that of your kids....ajajajae

[Reply](#)



Jone 1/17/2026 at 10:59 AM

0

From the perspective of the non-Western bloc, there's no best new than to be amazed realizing that the fire is turning the circus, aka the collective West, into ashes. It's karma for their deeds in the last half millennium

[Reply](#)



Pathway Finance 1/17/2026 at 10:57 AM

0

Are they EU leaders??? Shame!

[Reply](#)



gottlieb vera 1/17/2026 at 10:36 AM

3

Some people are VERY SLOW LEARNERS...

[Reply](#)



Robert Mould 1/17/2026 at 10:27 AM

0

EU being play the same script book like Ukraine just in bigger scale. if you win UK US win. if Russian win UK US will not get hurt.

so now you just look back what was promise to Ukarine, you were in the meeting room.

same promise you given.

[Reply](#)



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0

1/17/2026 at 8:46 AM

ryan midget down under 80 proof bar said he's proud his nation loves hedonists and schadenfreude

[Reply](#)



Tanvir 1/17/2026 at 7:35 AM

0

Oreshnik brings out the best in Russia's enemies.

[Reply](#)



jack sparrow 1/17/2026 at 6:31 AM

2

as they say, can't beat them, join them

[Reply](#)



Andy Goh 1/17/2026 at 5:58 AM

0

Moving towards sleeping with the enemy? Great!
Now it is the Russian side to play divide and conquer.

[Reply](#)

A Ana 1/17/2026 at 5:48 AM

1

The should not be trusted. They are probably preparing some trickery.

[Reply](#)

J Jõa 1/17/2026 at 4:12 AM

7

Judas used a kiss to identify the Lord to be caught. A kiss is not always what it is nor a smile a good sign.

[Reply](#)



Suli 1/17/2026 at 5:46 AM ↑

0

I appreciate your comment. Interesting and also intriguing.

[Reply](#)

A Anony Mouse 1/16/2026 at 6:49 PM

19

Are We Russians once again Europeans??

2024 – 2025 I was apperently an **Asian**

2022-2023 I was an **Orc**

2014-2021 I was a **gay-hating undemocratic Pro-Putin**

1991 – 2013 I was a **Russian**

1945 – 1991 my grandmother and me were **commies**

1941 -1945 my Grandmother was an **üntermench**

1918-1941 my family was **reds**

I wonder what I will be **2027?**

[Reply](#)



Anonydun "Hanonymouse" 82fgoog

3

1/16/2026 at 7:06 PM ↑

Survivor of the nuclear war?

[Reply](#)