

Juncker to Meet Putin at Russia's St. Petersburg Economic Forum

By [The Moscow Times](#)

May 30, 2016



European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker

Both Moscow and Brussels have confirmed that the European Commission's President Jean-Claude Juncker will attend Russia's St. Petersburg Forum next month. Juncker, who is expected to meet Vladimir Putin at the event, will be the first head of an EU institution to visit the country since the start of the war in Ukraine.

Juncker's visit will come shortly before Western imposed sanctions on Russia are up for renewal next month and less than three weeks before the planned NATO summit in Warsaw. Russian officials hope to convince Western businessmen at the forum to return to Russia and forget the potential economic impact of continued sanctions.

The move is likely to provoke mixed reactions from European capitals. The EU's eastern flank, particularly Poland and the Baltic states, has repeatedly warned against renewing working relations with Moscow following the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine.

“The Kremlin uses meetings to create the impression of business as usual, and usually reports this impression to their own public,” Lithuanian Foreign Minister told Politico Europe.

Though the EU is expected to prolong the sanctions imposed on Moscow for its actions in Ukraine, other EU states are pushing for the restoration of relations with Moscow. The French Senate is scheduled to debate the future of sanctions on June 8, while Italy has also expressed a desire to soften the EU's position on Moscow.

Juncker has been criticized for his position on EU-Russia relations in the past. In October last year, he told journalists that the EU had to make efforts towards a practical relationship with Russia. “Russia must be treated decently. We can't let our relationship with Russia be dictated by Washington,” he said.

European Commission spokesperson Margaritis Schinas told reporters that the visit would “convey to the Russian leadership, as well as to a wider audience, the EU's perspective regarding the current state of EU-Russia relations. We don't see any inconsistency with the decision of the president to attend [the forum,]” he said.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow was not optimistic that Juncker's trip would lead to a warming in ties between Brussels and Moscow.

Other EU politicians on the list for this year's event are Hungary's foreign minister and Greece's tourism minister. Former French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine and Europe's former trade commissioner turned lobbyist Peter Mandelson are also on the list of attendees. Last year, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras attended the forum.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/05/30/juncker-to-meet-putin-at-russias-st-petersburg-economic-forum-a53068>