

From Russia, No Love for EU's New Chief and Her Hawkish Stance

By [Bloomberg](#)

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Ursula von der Leyen EP / Flickr (CC-BY-4.0)

Ursula von der Leyen won't be getting a bear hug from the Kremlin.

Russia's top diplomat was asked during a visit to Germany about the incoming president of the European Commission and her "strict" view of his country. His frosty response was that the decision by the European Union's leaders and Parliament was one "we simply acknowledge."

"Show me anyone who isn't critical of Russia nowadays," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters on Thursday at a conference in the city of Koenigswinter. "We are pragmatists, we want to focus on practical matters, not on public statements."

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Von der Leyen takes over at the helm of the EU's executive arm in November and Chancellor Angela Merkel's defense minister staked out a hawkish stance on Russia. She's led calls for a common European military strategy since Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and is a staunch backer of sanctions.

"The Kremlin doesn't forgive weakness," von der Leyen told Die Welt in an interview Thursday. "From a position of strength we should stand by Russian sanctions."

Lavrov's language was calculatingly neutral, saying President Vladimir Putin will react to EU policy rather than dwell on verbal volleys.

"I hope that the new composition of the European Commission will conduct an inventory of relations with Russia, and when they express their position on the long-term development of relations with us, we will of course respond," Lavrov said.

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