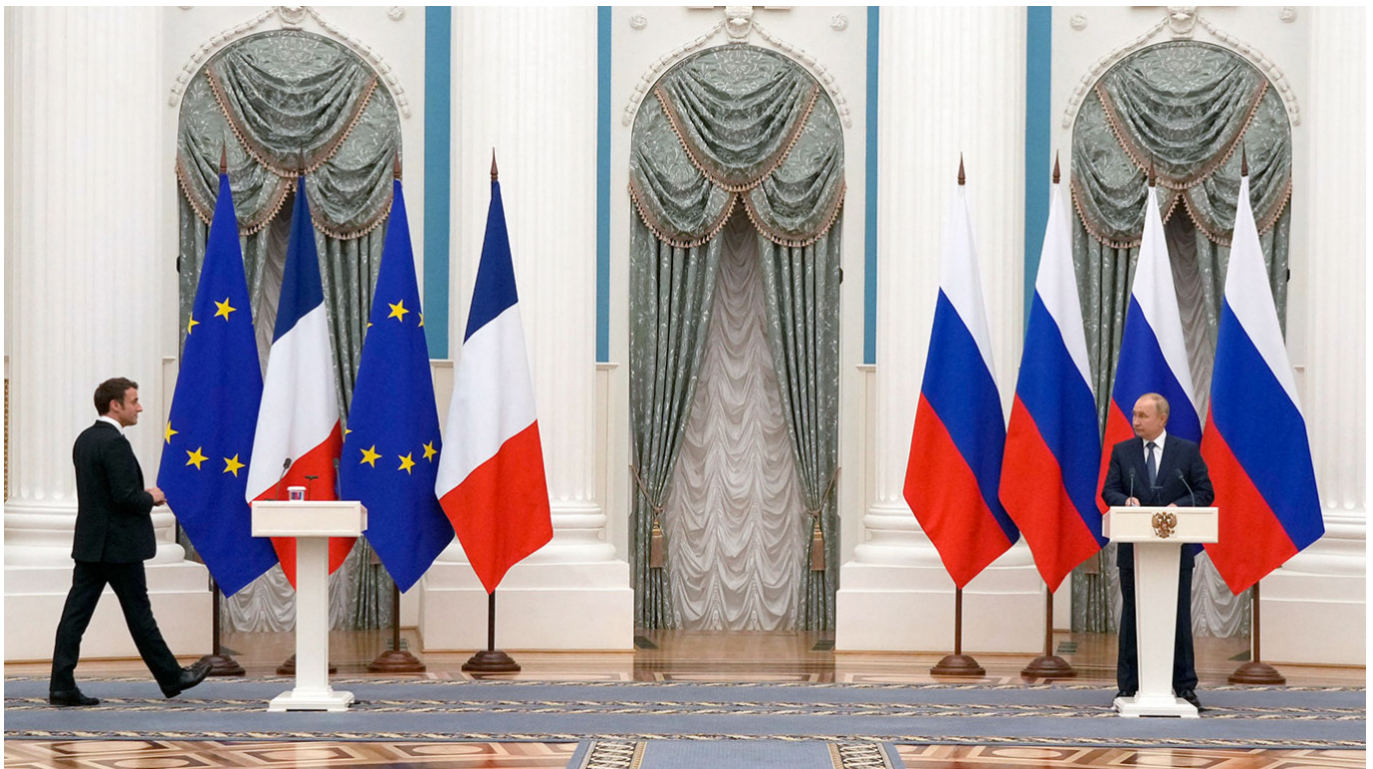


# Macron's Refusal of Russian Covid Test Behind Distanced Putin Talks

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Thibault Camus / EPA / POOL MAXPPP OUT / TASS

Russian President Vladimir Putin's talks with French counterpart Emmanuel Macron this week was held with social distancing after the French leader declined to take a Russian-administered coronavirus test, the Kremlin said Friday.

Putin and Macron spoke from opposite ends of a 13-meter table in the Kremlin on Monday, with the French president hoping to convince Putin to take steps toward de-escalating the current crisis over Ukraine.

While the Kremlin requires all state visitors to pass a Russian-administered Covid test before meeting the president, sources close to Macron [told](#) Reuters that he refused on the grounds that he didn't want to hand over his DNA to the Russian state.

As a result, the French president was subject to strict social distancing measures throughout his visit.

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“We knew very well that meant no handshake and that long table. But we could not accept that they get their hands on the president's DNA,” one of the sources close to Macron told Reuters.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed the reports Friday, saying some world leaders choose to “follow their own rules” while visiting other countries with differing Covid-19 rules.

"Talks with some are being held at a long table, the distance (across the table) is about six meters," Peskov said.

He said that it ensured the pair maintained a safe distance during their talks that lasted over five hours.

"There is no politics here and this in no way interferes with negotiations," Peskov added.

Macron had taken a PCR test before departure as well as an antigen test with his personal doctor on arrival in the Russian capital.

“The President and his entourage did what was required, as is always the case when he travels,” an Elysée official said following Reuters' report. “This was just a matter of how the tests were conducted ... this was about who carries out the test, how the tests are carried out, and so on.”

“We deemed that the conditions for closer contact were not acceptable, and chose the other option offered to us according to Russian protocol,” the official said.

Putin himself has remained in a strict health bubble since the start of the pandemic, carrying out most meetings via videoconference and requiring those who come into contact with him to quarantine beforehand.

Macron, who sought to ease tensions between Russia and the West over the 100,000 Russian troops massed near Ukraine's border, claimed to have won a pledge from Putin that Russia “would not be the source of an escalation” of the situation.

Following the talks, Putin said that "we will do everything to find compromises that suit everyone."

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