

Putin Not Invited to Schröder's 70th Birthday Bash

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President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

This year's birthday celebrations for former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder do not include President Vladimir Putin, an absence that has been linked to the German politician's controversial statements on Crimea in recent weeks.

Putin's absence from the guest list for Schröder's 70th birthday received widespread coverage in the German media because the politicians, both of whom worked together as heads of state of their countries at the beginning of the millennium, are known to have close ties.

This year's celebration lacked any sign of their close rapport, unlike Schröder's 60th birthday bash, during which Putin reportedly made a rousing speech stressing Schröder's role in German-Russian relations and gave celebrations a Russian twist by bringing along a Cossack choir.

German media have reported that the criticism Schröder received for seemingly backing

Russia on Crimea might be the reason behind the Russian leader's absence this year.

Schröder earlier said that though he thought Russia's involvement in Crimea was against international law, he himself had made a similar decision during his time in office, alluding to Germany getting involved in Kosovo without a United Nations Security Council resolution.

He also blamed the European Union for its role in escalating the conflict in Ukraine. In an interview session hosted by weekly newspaper Die Zeit in March, Schröder said that urging Ukraine to strengthen its ties with Brussels had put the country up against a wall and forced it to choose between Russia and the EU.

Schröder's support of the Kremlin and his role in Russian business has been met with criticism at home, with German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung calling him "Russia's, and indeed Putin's, top lobbyist."

When asked by German talk show host Reinhold Beckmann whether he considered Putin "a flawless democrat," Schröder agreed that he essentially did.

Weeks after losing his position as German Chancellor to Angela Merkel, Schröder landed a prestigious job with Nord Stream, a subsidiary of Russian energy company Gazprom. Two of the German politician's three children were adopted from Russian orphanages.

Schröder celebrated his 70th birthday with a reception hosted by the Social Democrat Party on Sunday. A small dinner with about 30 friends and family was planned for Monday, the date of his actual birthday.

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