
PUTIN SERENADES ITALY INC. AMID UKRAINE CRISIS

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Russian President Vladimir Putin is holding a video call with the big beasts of Italian business on Wednesday, but strong corporate ties between Russia and Italy don't mean that Rome will oppose sanctions against Moscow as it did after the invasion of Crimea in 2014.

The lucrative commercial ties between Italy and Russia were a decisive factor in the Ukraine crisis of 2014-2015, when Rome was at the forefront of diplomatic efforts to prevent tough EU sanctions on Russia. Federica Mogherini acted as the dove-in-chief on Russia both as Italian foreign minister and later as EU foreign policy chief. Diplomats from Poland, Britain, Sweden and the Baltic nations fulminated against a "Club Med" of Italian-led southern European countries that opposed a hard line on Putin.

Given that history of Italian opposition to sanctions, it's logical that Putin sees an advantage to devoting time to Italian executives amid the most serious military stand-off in Europe in years, with some 100,000 Russian troops massed on the Ukrainian border.

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