

Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly

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4 December 2014, 13:20, The Kremlin, Moscow



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Vladimir Putin made his Annual Address to the Federal Assembly. As is tradition, the Address took place at the Kremlin's St George Hall before an audience of more than 1,000 people.

In his Address, the President set out his views on the situation in Ukraine and outlined Russia's position with regard to events taking place there. In the foreign policy section of the Address, Mr Putin also spoke about international security issues and the integration processes taking place in the world.

On the subject of Russia's economic strategy, the President said that Russia is open to the world, to investment and to carrying out projects together, but ultimately, Russia's development depends above all on the country's own efforts. Mr Putin named development of new technology and competitive goods, giving the country's industry and financial sector a more solid foundation, and training the needed personnel as priority tasks.

The President also talked about relations between the state and business, in particular the need to free up the environment for doing business as much as possible and the concrete steps that can be taken to achieve this. Mr Putin proposed that no changes be made to the current tax rules for the next four years, and also proposed an amnesty for capital returning to Russia.

The President set the goal of reaching growth rates above the world average within the next 3-4 years.

Mr Putin also set objectives in the financial sector, agribusiness, and the banking sector, and declared the need to free Russia from dependence on foreign technology. Import substitution is a long term strategy, the President said, and is a goal for Russia regardless of the situation with sanctions. Mr Putin also gave the main target figures for Russian exports and investment levels.

The President proposed implementing a national technology initiative that will involve forecasting the

technology needs required to guarantee Russia's national security and ensure high living standards and economic development over the coming 10-15 years.

The President also spoke about demography, healthcare and education.

In his concluding section, Mr Putin focused on the dialogue between the state authorities and the public and the need to raise civic activeness and Russia's civil society potential.

Those present for the Address included members of the Federation Council, State Duma deputies, members of the Government, heads of the Constitutional and Supreme Courts, regional governors, heads of regional legislative assemblies, heads of Russia's traditional religious faiths, public figures, including heads of regional public chambers, and the heads of Russia's biggest media outlets.

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PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA VLADIMIR PUTIN: Citizens of Russia, members of the Federation Council and deputies of the State Duma,

Today's address will be related to the current situation and conditions, as well as the tasks we are facing. But before delivering it I'd like to thank all of you for the support, unity and solidarity you have shown during the landmark events that will seriously influence the future of our country.

This year we faced trials that only a mature and united nation and a truly sovereign and strong state can withstand. **Russia has proved that it can protect its compatriots and defend truth and fairness.**

Russia has done this thanks to its citizens, thanks to your work and the results we have achieved together, and thanks to our profound understanding of the essence and importance of national interests. We have become aware of the indivisibility and integrity of the thousand-year long history of our country. We have come to believe in ourselves, to believe that we can do much and achieve every goal.

Of course, we will talk about this year's landmark events. You know that **a referendum was held in Crimea in March, at which its residents clearly expressed their desire to join Russia. After that, the Crimean parliament – it should be stressed that it was a legitimate parliament that was elected back in 2010 – adopted a resolution on sovereignty.** And then we saw the historical reunification of Crimea and Sevastopol with Russia.

It was an event of special significance for the country and the people, because Crimea is where our people live, and the peninsula is of strategic importance for Russia as the spiritual source of the development of a multifaceted but solid Russian nation and a centralised Russian state. It was in Crimea, in the ancient city of Chersonesus or Korsun, as ancient Russian chroniclers called it, that Grand Prince Vladimir was baptised before bringing Christianity to Rus.

In addition to ethnic similarity, a common language, common elements of their material culture, a common territory, even though its borders were not marked then, and a nascent common economy and government, Christianity was a powerful spiritual unifying force that helped involve various tribes and tribal unions of the vast Eastern Slavic world in the creation of a Russian nation and Russian state. It was thanks to this spiritual unity that our forefathers for the first time and forevermore saw themselves as a united nation. All of this allows us to say that Crimea, the ancient Korsun or Chersonesus, and Sevastopol have invaluable civilisational and even sacral importance for Russia, like the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for the followers of Islam and Judaism.

And this is how we will always consider it.

Dear friends,

We cannot fail to mention today our perspective on the developments in Ukraine and how we intend to work with our partners around the world.

It is well known that Russia not only supported Ukraine and other brotherly republics of the former Soviet Union in their aspirations to sovereignty, but also facilitated this process greatly in the 1990ies. Since then, our position has remained unchanged.

Every nation has an inalienable sovereign right to determine its own development path, choose allies and political regimes, create an economy and ensure its security. Russia has always respected these rights and always will. This fully applies to Ukraine and the Ukrainian people.

It is true that we condemned the government coup and the forceful takeover of power in Kiev in February of this year. The developments we are currently witnessing in Ukraine and the tragedy unfolding in the country's southeast prove that we were right to take such a stand.

How did it all begin? I will have to remind you what happened back then. It is hard to believe that it all started with a technical decision by President Yanukovich to postpone the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union. Make no mistake, he did not refuse to sign the document, but only postponed it in order to make some adjustments.

As you recall, this move was fully in line with the constitutional authority vested upon an absolutely legitimate and internationally recognised head of state.

Against this background, there was no way we could support this armed coup, the violence and the killings. Just take the bloody events in Odessa, where people were burned alive. How can the subsequent attempts to suppress people in Ukraine's southeast, who oppose this mayhem, be supported? I reiterate that there was no way we could endorse these developments. What's more, they were followed by hypocritical statements on the protection of international law and human rights. This is just cynical. I strongly believe that the time will come when the Ukrainian people will deliver a just assessment of these developments.

How did the dialogue on this issue begin between Russia and its American and European partners? I mentioned our American friends for a reason, since they are always influencing Russia's relations with its neighbours, either openly or behind the scenes. Sometimes it is even unclear whom to talk to: to the governments of certain countries or directly with their American patrons and sponsors.

As I mentioned, in the case of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement, there was no dialogue at all. We were told that it was none of our business or, to put it simply, we were told where to go.

All the arguments that Russia and Ukraine are members of the CIS free-trade zone, that we have deep-rooted cooperation in industry and agriculture, and basically share the same infrastructure – no one wanted to hear these arguments, let alone take them into account.

Our response was to say: fine, if you do not want to have a dialogue with us, we will have to protect our legitimate interests unilaterally and will not pay for what we view as erroneous policy.

So what's come out of it all? The agreement between Ukraine and the European Union has been signed and ratified, but the implementation of the provisions regarding trade and economy has been postponed until the end of next year. Doesn't this mean that we were the ones who were actually right?

There is also a question of why all this was done in Ukraine? What was the purpose of the government

coup? Why shoot and keep shooting and killing people? In fact, the economy, finance and the social sector were destroyed and the country ruined.

What Ukraine currently needs is economic assistance in carrying out reforms, not petty politics and pompous empty promises. However, our Western colleagues don't seem eager to provide such assistance, while the Kiev authorities are not willing to address the challenges their people are facing.

By the way, Russia has already made a major contribution to helping Ukraine. Let me reiterate that Russian banks already invested some \$25 billion in Ukraine. Last year, Russia's Finance Ministry extended a loan worth another \$3 billion. Gazprom provided another \$5.5 billion to Ukraine and even offered a discount that no one promised, requiring the country to pay \$4.5 billion. Add it all up and you get as much as \$ 32.5-33.5 billion that were provided only recently.

Of course, we have the right to ask questions. What was this Ukrainian tragedy for? Wasn't it possible to settle all the issues, even disputed issues, through dialogue, within a legal framework and legitimately?

But now we are being told that this was actually competent, balanced politics that we should comply with unquestionably and blindfolded.

This will never happen.

If for some European countries national pride is a long-forgotten concept and sovereignty is too much of a luxury, true sovereignty for Russia is absolutely necessary for survival.

Primarily, we should realise this as a nation. I would like to emphasise this: either we remain a sovereign nation, or we dissolve without a trace and lose our identity. Of course, other countries need to understand this, too. All participants in international life should be aware of this. And they should use this understanding to strengthen the role and the importance of international law, which we've talked about so much lately, rather than bend its standards to suit someone's strategic interests contrary to its fundamental principles and common sense, considering everyone else to be poorly educated people who can't read or write.

It is imperative to respect the legitimate interests of all the participants in international dialogue. Only then, not with guns, missiles or combat aircraft, but precisely with the rule of law will we reliably protect the world against bloody conflict. Only then, will there be no need to scare anyone with imaginary isolation, and without any self-deception in the process, or sanctions, which are, of course, damaging, but damaging to everyone, including those who initiate them.

Speaking of the sanctions, they are not just a knee-jerk reaction on behalf of the United States or its allies to our position regarding the events and the coup in Ukraine, or even the so-called Crimean Spring. I'm sure that if these events had never happened – I want to point this out specifically for you as politicians sitting in this auditorium – if none of that had ever happened, they would have come up with some other excuse to try to contain Russia's growing capabilities, affect our country in some way, or even take advantage of it.

The policy of containment was not invented yesterday. It has been carried out against our country for many years, always, for decades, if not centuries. In short, whenever someone thinks that Russia has become too strong or independent, these tools are quickly put into use.

However, talking to Russia from a position of force is an exercise in futility, even when it was faced with domestic hardships, as in the 1990ies and early 2000ies.

We remember well how and who, almost openly, supported separatism back then and even outright

terrorism in Russia, referred to murderers, whose hands were stained with blood, none other than rebels and organised high-level receptions for them. These “rebels” showed up in Chechnya again. I'm sure the local law enforcement authorities will take proper care of them. They are now working to eliminate another terrorist raid. Let's support them.

Let me reiterate, we remember high-level receptions for terrorists dubbed as fighters for freedom and democracy. Back then, we realised that the more ground we give and the more excuses we make, the more our opponents become brazen and the more cynical and aggressive their demeanour becomes.

Despite our unprecedented openness back then and our willingness to cooperate in all, even the most sensitive issues, despite the fact that we considered – and all of you are aware of this and remember it – our former adversaries as close friends and even allies, the support for separatism in Russia from across the pond, including information, political and financial support and support provided by the special services – was absolutely obvious and left no doubt that they would gladly let Russia follow the Yugoslav scenario of disintegration and dismemberment. With all the tragic fallout for the people of Russia.

It didn't work. We didn't allow that to happen.

Just as it did not work for Hitler with his people-hating ideas, who set out to destroy Russia and push us back beyond the Urals. Everyone should remember how it ended.

Next year, we will mark the 70th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War. Our Army crushed the enemy and liberated Europe. However, we should not forget about the bitter defeats in 1941 and 1942 so as not to repeat the mistakes in the future.

In this context, I will touch on an international security issue. There are many issues related to this. These include the fight against terrorism. We still encounter its manifestations, and of course, we will participate in the joint efforts to counter terrorism on the international level. Of course, we will work together to deal with other challenges, such as the spread of infectious diseases.

However, in this case I would like to speak about the most serious and sensitive issue: international security. Since 2002, after the US unilaterally pulled out of the ABM Treaty, which was absolutely a cornerstone of international security, a strategic balance of forces and stability, the US has been working relentlessly to create a global missile defence system, including in Europe. This poses a threat not only to Russia, but to the world as a whole – precisely due to the possible disruption of this strategic balance of forces.

I believe that this is bad for the US as well, because it creates the dangerous illusion of invulnerability. It strengthens the striving for unilateral, often, as we can see, ill-considered decisions and additional risks.

We have said much about this. I will not go into details now. I will only say this. Maybe I am repeating myself. We have no intention to become involved in a costly arms race, but at the same time we will reliably and dependably guarantee our country's defence in the new conditions. There are absolutely no doubts about this. This will be done. Russia has both the capability and the innovative solutions for this.

To be continued.