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## Answers to journalists' questions

6 December 2014, 18:35, Moscow



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Vladimir Putin answered journalists' questions following his meeting with President of France François Hollande.

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**QUESTION:** Mr President, what's your opinion on the situation in Ukraine at the moment?

**PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA**

**VLADIMIR PUTIN:** The situation is tragic. We still see people dying there, but I do hope that in the near future there will be a final decision on ceasefire. We just discussed this in detail with the President of France.

I hope – and Russia definitely supports this, just as France does and all the other countries involved in the settlement process – that additional steps will be

taken to exchange prisoners of war.

I also proceed from the fact that the country's economic life will be restored, and any elements of blockade of this region will be eliminated from real life, otherwise it would be difficult to imagine how the nation's territorial integrity could be restored. As you know, we in Russia support Ukraine's territorial integrity.

In my opinion, the situation that exists at the moment allows us to hope for improvements and I believe – at least, I hope – that this could happen or will happen in the nearest future.

**QUESTION:** Mr President, how do you assess the current stage of implementing the Minsk agreements?

**VLADIMIR PUTIN:** As you know, Russia was the initiator of the meetings in Minsk, and the protocols were signed with our direct involvement, so we stand for their full implementation.

At the same time, we see that the authorities in Kiev and Donetsk and Lugansk, that is both parties to the conflict, do not implement everything that has been agreed upon in Minsk. But we still hope that Kiev and Donetsk and Lugansk will ultimately find a mutually acceptable arrangement that would satisfy all the parties and what's most important, put an end to the armed part of the conflict for the time being.

You see, the experts have agreed to set several lines for withdrawing heavy equipment and weaponry. One such line is a simple civil separation line; another line is for the artillery, and yet another one, which lies further onward, was set for withdrawing the multiple launch rocket systems. As regards the lines for

withdrawing the artillery and the MLRS, there were no differences on the issue at all as everyone agreed to it, but this has to be done as soon as possible.

I very much hope that this would be done in the nearest future because once this is achieved, once the shelling ends and no more people are killed, that's when we can start talking about the real beginning of a political process and about restoration of any common political space. But this has to be done as soon as possible.

**QUESTION:** Could you tell us about the results of your talks with the President of France?

**VLADIMIR PUTIN:** We exchanged opinions on what is happening – in this case in Ukraine – and we actually spoke about the things I just mentioned.

Both France and Russia call for an immediate end to bloodshed and advocate steps to bring about a rapprochement between the parties to the conflict, including in respect of restoring the common political space, as I have already said.

And, of course, we discussed the necessity of restoring the economic ties between Ukraine's southeast and the rest of the country because both parts of the territory need one another. As you know, a considerable part of Ukraine's energy sector has been originally built and relies on coal mined in eastern Ukraine.

Ultimately, economic ties have to be restored with coal being forwarded from that region in return for electricity; financial institutions should function normally again. All this can and must be done. As soon as possible.

**QUESTION:** Was Ukraine the only subject discussed?

**VLADIMIR PUTIN:** No, we also discussed bilateral relations, settlement in Syria, Iran's nuclear programme. We discussed a whole bunch of topics so the meeting was very constructive and substantive.

**QUESTION:** Mr President, did you discuss the Mistral deal?

**VLADIMIR PUTIN:** No, we didn't discuss it. Didn't even mention it.

There is a contract, a legal document. We proceed from the fact that it will be fulfilled. I didn't ask questions, and President Hollande said nothing about it.

But if it is not fulfilled, we will have no special claims. Of course, we expect to get back the money we paid under that contract. Otherwise, however the situation on this issue may develop, we will treat it with understanding.

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