

PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA VLADIMIR PUTIN

Colleagues, friends,

Meetings with the diplomatic corps have become a tradition. We need this direct conversation to make an overall assessment of the situation in the world, to set current and long-term foreign policy objectives and on that basis to more effectively coordinate the work of our missions abroad.

I would like to begin by saying that the Foreign Ministry and our embassies are under a lot of pressure; we see this, we are aware of this, but this pressure will not be reduced. It will only increase, just as the requirement to show efficiency, precision and flexibility in our actions to ensure Russia's national interests.

You know how dynamic and unpredictable international developments may sometimes be. They seem to be pressed together and unfortunately are not all of a positive nature. The potential for conflict is growing in the world, old contradictions are growing ever more acute and new ones are being provoked. We come across such developments, often unexpectedly, and we observe with regret that international law is not working, the most basic norms of decency are not complied with and the principle of all-permissiveness is gaining the upper hand.

We are observing this in Ukraine as well. We need to understand clearly that the events provoked in Ukraine are the concentrated outcome of the notorious deterrence policy. As you may know, its roots go deep into history and it is clear that unfortunately, this policy did not end with the end of the Cold War.

In Ukraine, as you may have seen, at threat were our compatriots, Russian people and people of other nationalities, their language, history, culture and legal rights, guaranteed, by the way, by European conventions. When I speak of Russians and Russian-speaking citizens I am referring to those people who consider themselves part of the broad Russian community, they may not necessarily be ethnic Russians, but they consider themselves Russian people.

What did our partners expect from us as the developments in Ukraine unfolded? We clearly had no right to abandon the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol to the mercy of nationalist and radical militants; we could not allow our access to the Black Sea to be significantly limited; we could not allow NATO forces to eventually come to the land of Crimea and Sevastopol, the land of Russian military glory, and cardinally change the balance of forces in the Black Sea area. This would mean giving up practically everything that Russia had fought for since the times of Peter the Great, or maybe even earlier – historians should know.

I would like to make it clear to all: this country will continue to actively defend the rights of Russians, our compatriots abroad, using the entire range of available means – from political and economic to operations under international humanitarian law and the right of self-defence.

I would like to stress that what happened in Ukraine was the climax of the negative tendencies in international affairs that had been building up for years. We have long been warning about this, and unfortunately, our predictions came true.

You know about the latest efforts to restore, to maintain peace in Ukraine. Foreign Ministry staff and the Minister himself took an active part in this. You know about the numerous telephone conversations we had on this subject.

Unfortunately, President Poroshenko has resolved to resume military action, and we failed – when I say ‘we’, I mean my colleagues in Europe and myself – we failed to convince him that the road to a secure, stable and inviolable peace cannot lie through war.

So far Mr Poroshenko was not directly linked to the orders to begin military action, and only now did he take full responsibility, and not only military, but political as well, which is much more important.

We also failed to agree to make public the statement approved by the foreign ministers of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine on the need to maintain peace and search for mutually acceptable solutions.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that after the ceasefire was declared, no substantive, as you say, negotiations on the settlement of the situation ever began. Virtually, a disarmament ultimatum was given. However, even the ceasefire was not bad overall, though not enough to settle the situation on a long-term basis in a way that would be acceptable to all the people living in the country, including those in its southeast.

A constitution was made public, but it was never discussed. Even within Ukrainian society there is a discussion of whether it is good or bad, but nobody definitely ever discussed it with the east.

Of course, everything that is going on in Ukraine is the internal affair of the Ukrainian state. It pains us to see people dying, especially civilians. As you may know, the number of refugees in the Russian Federation is growing. We will of course provide assistance to all those who need it. However, killing journalists is unacceptable. I reminded the Ukrainian President of this yesterday yet again.

In my view, we are observing a focused effort to liquidate all media representatives. This applies to both Russian and foreign journalists. Who could be afraid of fair reporting? Probably those, who are committing crimes. We strongly hope that the Ukrainian authorities act on their promises to carefully investigate the crimes.

More new hotspots are appearing on the world map. There is a deficit of security in Europe, in the Middle East, South-East Asia, in the Asia-Pacific region and in Africa. The global economic, financial and trade systems are becoming unbalanced, and moral and spiritual values are being washed out.

There is hardly any doubt that the unipolar world order did not come to be. Peoples and countries are raising their voices in favour of self-determination and civilizational and cultural identity, which conflicts with the attempts by certain countries to maintain their domination in the military sphere, in politics, finance, the economy and in ideology.

I know this has no direct bearing on us, however what is being done to the French banks can cause nothing but indignation in Europe in general and here as well. We are aware of the pressure our American partners are putting on France to force it not to supply Mistrals to Russia. We even know that they hinted that if France does not deliver the Mistrals, the sanctions will be quietly lifted from their banks, or at least they will be significantly minimised.

What is this if not blackmail? Is this the right way to act on the international arena? Besides, when we speak of sanctions, we always assume that sanctions are applied pursuant to Article 7 of the UN Charter. Otherwise, these are not sanctions in the true legal sense of the word, but something different, some other unilateral policy instrument.

In the past 20 years, our partners have been trying to convince Russia of their good intentions, their readiness to jointly develop strategic cooperation. However, at the same time they kept expanding NATO, extending the area under their military and political control ever closer to our borders. And when we rightfully asked: “Don’t you find it possible and necessary to discuss this with us?” they said: “No, this is none of your business.” Those who continue insisting on their exclusivity strongly dislike Russia’s independent policy. The events in Ukraine prove this. They also prove that a model of relations full of double standards does not work with Russia.

Nevertheless, I hope pragmatism will eventually prevail. We need to get rid of ambitions, of attempts to establish a ‘world barracks’ and arrange everybody by rank, or to impose single rules of behaviour and life, and to finally begin building relations based on equality, mutual respect and concern for mutual interests. It is time we admit each other’s right to be different, the right of every country to live its own life rather than to be told what to do by someone else.

Colleagues, in its foreign policy Russia has been consistently proceeding from the notion that solutions to global and regional conflicts should be sought not through confrontation, but through cooperation and compromise. We advocate the supremacy of international law while supporting the UN’s leading role.

International law should be mandatory for all and should not be applied selectively to serve the interests of individual select countries or groups of states, and most importantly, it should be interpreted consistently. It is impossible to interpret it in one way today, and in a different way tomorrow to match the political goals of the day.

World development cannot be unified. However, we can look for common issues, see each other as partners rather than competitors, and establish cooperation between states, their associations and integration structures.

These are the principles we were guided by in the past, and they continue to guide us now as we promote integration within the CIS. Strengthening close friendly ties and developing mutually advantageous economic cooperation with our neighbours is the key strategic priority of Russia's long-term foreign policy.

The driving force behind Eurasian integration is the trio of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. The Agreement on the Eurasian Economic Union, signed in Astana on May 29, symbolises a qualitatively new step in our relations. A powerful centre of economic development that attracts business and investors, a common market is being formed in Eurasia. That is why our CIS partners show a strong interest in this union. I hope that very soon, Armenia will become a full-fledged member of this union. Negotiations with Kyrgyzstan are at an advanced stage. We are open to other Commonwealth states as well.

As we promote the Eurasian integration project, we are in no way trying to separate ourselves from the rest of the world; we are ready to consider prospects for creating free trade zones both with individual states and with regional associations and unions, primarily the European Union, of course.

Europe is our natural and most significant trade and economic partner. We strive to find new opportunities to expand our business cooperation, to open up new prospects for mutual investment and to lift trade barriers. This requires an upgrade of the legal contractual base of our cooperation and the stability and predictability of ties, primarily in such strategically important areas as energy. Stability on the entire territory of Eurasia and sustainable development of the EU economies and Russia depend on well-coordinated cooperation based on consideration for mutual interests.

We have always held high our reputation of a reliable supplier of energy resources and invested in the development of gas infrastructure. Together with European companies, as you may know, we have built a new gas transportation system called Nord Stream under the Baltic Sea. Despite certain difficulties, we will promote the South Stream project, especially since ever more European politicians and businessmen are coming to understand that someone simply wants to use Europe in their own interests, that it is becoming a hostage of someone's near-sighted ideologised approaches.

If we return to Ukraine, the violation by Ukraine of its commitments regarding the purchase of our natural gas has become a common problem. Kiev refuses to pay on its debt. This is absolutely unacceptable. They have not paid for November-December of last year, though there were no arguments whatsoever then.

Our partners are using blatant blackmail – this is what it is. They demand an ungrounded reduction of prices on our goods, though the agreement was signed in 2009, and the parties complied with it in good faith. Now, as you may know, the court in Kiev has lifted all accusations against Ukraine's former Prime Minister Tymoshenko, who signed the contract. Thus, the Kiev court authorities admit that they have done everything right not only by international law, but by Ukrainian law as well. But they do not wish to comply, or to pay for the product already received.

As of June 16, as you may know, we have transferred Ukraine to a pre-payment system, so they will get exactly the amount of gas they pay for. Today they do not pay; therefore, they are not getting anything – only in the so-called reverse mode. We know all about this reverse mode: it is a fake; there is no reverse mode. How can you supply gas two ways along the same pipeline? One does not have to be a gas transportation expert to understand that this is impossible. They are playing tricks with some of their partners: in fact, they are getting our gas and paying some western partners in Europe who are not receiving their volume. We are quite aware of this.

We are not taking any action at this point only because we do not want the situation to deteriorate. However, everyone should draw the proper conclusions from the situation. The main thing is that honest gas consumers and suppliers should not suffer from the actions of Ukrainian politicians and bureaucrats.

Generally, all of us – Ukraine, our European partners, and we – should seriously consider how to reduce the probability of any type of political or economic risks or force majeure situations on the continent.

In this connection, I would like to remind you that in August 2015 we will be marking 40 years of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. This anniversary is a good reason not only to turn to the basic principles of cooperation on the continent that were laid back in 1975, but also to jointly make them work, to help them take root in practical European politics.

We have to work consistently to rule out any unconstitutional coups in Europe, any interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, the use of blackmail or threats in international relations or the support of radical and neo-Nazi forces.

All of us in Europe need a sort of safety net to make sure that Iraqi, Libyan or Syrian – and unfortunately, I have to say also Ukrainian – precedents do not become contagious. This is especially dangerous for the post-Soviet area, because the states have yet not gained political or economic strength, they do not have a stable political system. It is very important that the constitutions of these states be treated with great care and respect.

Why is this important – and not only on the post-Soviet area, but all over Europe? Because even in those countries of Western and Eastern Europe where things seem to be going fine, there are quite a few hidden ethnic and social contradictions that may become acute any moment, may serve as ground for conflicts and extremism, and may be used by external forces to rock the social and political situation to achieve an illegitimate undemocratic change of power with all the negative consequences.

Firm guarantees of indivisible security, stability, respect for sovereignty and non-interference in each other's internal affairs should become the basis that we can use to build a common space for economic and humanitarian cooperation that would spread from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean – I already spoke of this as a single space from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

I would like to ask the Foreign Ministry to draft a set of proposals in this respect, with special focus on the inadmissibility of any attempts to influence internal political processes from the outside. The job is to work the traditional principle of non-interference into the modern European realities and initiate a serious international discussion on the subject.

We also need to continue strengthening the eastern vector of our diplomacy, to more intensively use the impressive potential of the Asia-Pacific region in the interests of the further development of our country, primarily, of course, of Siberia and the Far East. We should continue to direct Russia's policy in Asia and the Pacific at maintaining the security of our eastern borders and at supporting peace and stability in the region. The coming leadership of Russia in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the SCO and BRICS summits to be held in Ufa in the summer of 2015 work to support this.

We need to strengthen overall partnership and strategic cooperation with the People's Republic of China. We can say that a strong Russian-Chinese connection has taken shape on the international arena. It is based on a coincidence of views on both global processes and key regional issues. It is of primary importance that Russian-Chinese friendship is not directed against anyone: we are not creating any military unions. On the contrary, this is an example of equal, respectful and productive cooperation between states in the 21st century.

We intend to further develop our relations with our traditional partners in this area of the world: with India and Vietnam, who are playing an ever-greater role in the world; with Japan and other countries, including the ASEAN states. We intend to further use the potential of the growing markets in Latin America and Africa and the great experience of political and humanitarian relations with the countries there.

Our contacts with the United States of America are of great importance for the whole world. We do not intend to shut down our relations with the USA. True, bilateral relations are not in their best shape, but – I would like to stress this – not through Russia's fault. We have always tried to be predictable partners and conduct our affairs on the basis of equality. However, in return, our lawful interests were often ignored.

Now over to various types of international meetings. If we are assigned the observer role without a decisive vote on key issues that are of vital importance to us, then such meetings are of little interest to us. We should not sacrifice our vital interests just for the sake of being able to sit and observe. I hope our partners will eventually come to understand this obvious fact. So far, we have been hearing ultimatums or mentoring. Nevertheless, we are ready for dialogue, but I would like to stress that this should be an equal dialogue.

Colleagues, the complicated and unpredictable situation in the world places great demands on Russian diplomats' professional level. The Foreign Ministry's staff in Moscow and the Russian embassies abroad worked effectively and in coordinated fashion during the serious situation with Crimea and Ukraine, and I want to thank you for this. I particularly note the work done by the heads and staff of Russia's representative missions at the UN and other key international organisations.

We must continue working with just such energy and dignity, in a spirit of tact, restraint and sense of measure of course. Our position must be based on clear and unshakeable principles of international law and legal and historical justification, on truth, justice, and the strength of moral superiority.

For my part, I can say that our country's leadership will continue to do everything necessary to give you good conditions for your professional activity. As you know, I have signed presidential executive orders raising the wages of Foreign Ministry staff. Wages of people working at the central office will increase 1.4-fold on average.

Pensions for diplomatic personnel taking their retirement after January 1, 2014, will increase 3.5-fold on average. Pay for the heads of foreign diplomatic missions will increase four-fold on average in ruble equivalent. Pension top-ups for ambassadors and permanent envoys going into retirement have also increased considerably.

Wages in rubles for personnel at diplomatic missions abroad will be increased a bit later, from January 1, 2016, but this will be a four-fold increase. I hope that these steps will help to boost the Foreign Ministry's human resources potential and thus make us more effective in carrying out our foreign policy.

I also ask the Government to speed up the decision on providing additional guarantees for personnel from other agencies and administrative and technical personnel working at Russian missions abroad, especially in situations where there are terrorist threats.

The Foreign Ministry has raised the question of giving diplomatic service the official legal status as a special type of civil service in Russia. We will examine this proposal.

This concludes my opening remarks.

I thank the members of the media for the attention they have given our work.