

# Presidents of Russia and France made press statements and answered media questions

Ahead of their talks, President of Russia Vladimir Putin and President of France Emmanuel Macron made press statements and answered media questions. The meeting continued behind closed doors.

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Russia was represented by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office and Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov, Presidential Aide Yury Ushakov and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Russia to France Alexei Meshkov.

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**President of France Emmanuel Macron** (retranslated): I will say a few words to the press and answer a few questions before we get down to work.

Before we begin, I would like to say that I am very happy to receive Mr Putin today. I would like to thank him for visiting me in Bregancon. We have planned a packed discussion for today. This is the next step after our meetings in Versailles and St Petersburg, and our most recent meeting in Osaka. Today we are meeting in this symbolic place on the Mediterranean, which has always been of great importance in our bilateral relations, and many artists, writers, and musicians from Russia have lived in this region – Nabokov, Turgenev, Stravinsky and many other cultural figures. They have always found inspiration here.

Today's discussion is very important to me, because today we are going through

a historical period. We will certainly talk first about the crises – we talked about them in Osaka – we will talk about Iran and discuss the possibilities for de-escalation in that country. Over the past few weeks, we have worked hard on this and have come up with numerous proposals. We also keep in touch with President Trump and with President Rouhani, to ensure that Iran always adheres to the JCPOA.

We will also talk about Ukraine, the Ukrainian crisis, about the choices made by President Zelensky and the position he has taken of late. I know that President Putin has spoken to him several times in recent days. So we can talk about this, prepare for future meetings, and together with Mr Zelensky, Vladimir Putin and Ms Merkel, we will try to consider the possibility of meeting in the Normandy format in a few weeks.

We will also discuss Syria, where a lot of work has been done, also hand in hand, in recent months. For example, in St Petersburg and Istanbul, we have laid the foundation for several humanitarian operations and developed new initiatives.

Today we are very concerned about events in Idlib. People in Idlib are living under constant shelling; civilians and children are dying. I believe this is an emergency and we must do everything we can to see that the ceasefire approved in Sochi holds.

Of course, we will try to develop political, diplomatic and constitutional deadlines to fulfil our responsibility. A lot of work has been done to move all the parties towards an attempt to reach stability and the restoration of Syria.

Of course, these crises will be the main topic of our talks today, because in several days France will host a G7 summit where we will also discuss these topics. This is why I would like to discuss them with Mr Putin ahead of the summit.

We have many topics for discussion, including of course, collective security and disarmament. Decisions on the INF Treaty have been made, and now we need to build the future of our common European security. I hope that we will have a detailed discussion on this.

We will also discuss climate change. I know that a very important decision was made in Russia recently: to ratify the Paris Agreement. This is a very important step from Russia.

I mean that supporting the Paris agenda is a very important step.

I would also like to convey my condolences on the terrible fires that broke out in Siberia this summer. It is true that the climatic agenda is once again vital.

I would like to say that today the world is living through a historical moment; the multilateral approach is often criticised, and we should think about ways to rebuild this world order. This means we should look for new cooperation mechanisms that will be useful to all of us.

In this case, in this context, our bilateral relations as well as relations between Russia and the European Union play a key and determinative role.

I am thinking about everything that has happened over the past few decades, what has managed to drive us apart. I know that Russia is a European country in its heart of hearts. And we believe in a Europe that spreads from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

Great Russian writer Dostoyevsky said (quoting from memory): “Russians have a peculiarity as regards other European nations. A Russian becomes most Russian when he is most European.” In other words, it is necessary for Russians to become part of the European world. This is why I believe in this European concept. I believe we should rebuild and revise the architecture of trust between Russia and the European Union. France will fully play its role in this respect.

As you know, we are facing new and common threats, whether it's in the nuclear area, cyber security or other areas. We must develop a common agenda and common methods for fighting and resolving these conflicts.

Since Russia is a European country, it has a full place in the European family. This is why France has done everything it could for Russia to return to the Council of Europe. And since France chairs the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe we have managed to use this opportunity to take the necessary measures.

Since such fundamental principles as freedom of speech, self-expression and so on are very important for the Council of Europe, it is necessary to implement all these freedoms

on the territory of Russia as well, because Russia is a European country.

I believe Mr Putin's presence here in Bregancon is very important. And I am very glad that we will spend several hours together.

Thank you, Mr President, thank you, dear Vladimir, for coming to Bregancon today, for finding the time to do this. I am very happy to see you here. Thank you.

**President of Russia Vladimir Putin:** I would like to thank the President of France for inviting me to this marvellous place, his official residence. We got a bird's eye view of this part of France from the helicopter and could see how beautiful it is. Mr Macron was kind enough to seat our delegation in the shade while he and his delegation are sitting in the sun, so I will try to be brief, although I have to repeat some points.

Of course, we will give due attention and find time to discuss bilateral relations. I would like to note on this point that, at the initiative of the President of France, we are developing civil society dialogue, the Trianon Dialogue, in addition to our traditional areas of cooperation.

Speaking about trade and economic ties, they have been growing recently. Trade is growing, although, to tell the truth, there was a certain adjustment in the first six months of this year. I believe there were sound reasons for this. There is a positive element to it: the trade balance is levelling out.

Let me recall that the cumulative investment of Russian companies in the French economy exceeds 3 billion – this is in dollars; the figure for French investment in the Russian economy is \$17 billion.

In all, 500 French companies are currently active in the Russian market, and I have the pleasure of meeting with French businesspeople regularly. A regular meeting with them took place in Moscow recently, a few months ago.

As for the international agenda, I certainly hope we will discuss international security issues. Mr President mentioned problems in this area, and they do exist. I would like to recall that it was not Russia that withdrew unilaterally from the ABM Treaty. We did not walk away from the INF Treaty either. Now, extending the Treaty on Strategic Offensive Arms

(START III) is on the agenda. We have not yet seen any initiatives from our American partners although our proposals are on the table.

We are worried about the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the potential militarisation of outer space, and here we have something to discuss. We would even like to discuss these items in detail to clear up the position of France on these vital issues, including space militarisation.

I would like to recall and repeat here in France that we assume a unilateral commitment on medium- and shorter-range missiles. If such attack systems are deployed by the US, we will also have them, but we will not deploy them anywhere unless US systems like this appear.

Regrettably, we have not yet heard any response to what we have expressed many times in public. We get the impression that they simply do not hear us. That said, I think the Europeans are interested in listening to us and responding appropriately.

Finally, we are bound to talk about regional conflicts. Of course, we will talk about southeast Ukraine, about Donbass. I will tell Mr President about my recent contact with the newly-elected president of Ukraine. There are certain things in this respect that may be discussed as well, that give us cautious optimism.

We will certainly talk about Syria. I would like to note that before the corresponding agreements were signed in Sochi, as the President said now, on the demilitarisation of part of the Idlib zone, about 50 percent of that territory was under terrorist control, and now that number is 90 percent. We are observing constant raids from there, and more than that we are seeing the movement of militants from that region to other parts of the world and this is extremely dangerous.

There were also numerous attempts to attack our air base in Khmeimim from the Idlib zone, so we support Syrian army efforts to carry out local operations to neutralise these terrorist threats.

I would like to remind you that no one ever talked about terrorists having an opportunity to concentrate in the Idlib zone and to feel comfortable operating there. On the contrary, it

was stressed that the fight against terrorists would continue.

Another important subject is Libya, of course. We must achieve reconciliation between the parties to the conflict. I would very much like to know the attitudes of the French Republic and the President of France on this subject, so that we could coordinate our efforts.

We are grateful to France for its position in the Council of Europe in favour of the full-scale return of the Russian delegation. I believe this will facilitate building normal, full-fledged and trusting relationships in Europe. I count on the support of France in building relationships with the European Union in the same spirit.

This is far from a complete list of what we are going to discuss today. But people-to-people cooperation is certainly on it. Mr Macron has just mentioned this. Indeed, Russia and France have close cooperative ties in this field and we have many topics to discuss here.

We have plans for next year to organise a number of events in France in the context of so-called Russian Seasons. All in all, 270 events in practically all departments of France and all large French cities. I hope it will be very interesting and positive both for French audiences and Russian performers. This will be another step on the road to building full-scale relations between our countries.

Thank you very much.

**Emmanuel Macron:** Thank you, Vladimir!

I believe we will answer a few questions on each side. Welcome.

**Question:** Mr Macron, you said that during this meeting you could agree on the terms for holding a summit in the Normandy format with the four leaders. You, Mr Putin, have repeatedly said that certain prerequisites are needed for this kind of summit because no one needs a meeting for the sake of meeting. Have the right conditions been met, and what are they? Thank you.

**Emmanuel Macron:** We will certainly be discussing this. There is a new factor, that is, Mr Zelensky, elected president of Ukraine, and his attitude from the time he assumed office. It should be noted that Mr Zelensky has taken several courageous steps regarding the conflict, which has been ongoing for five years now, and which has resulted in civilians living in terrible conditions.

We should remember Russia's regional role. Mr Zelensky has taken several short-term measures, and we will discuss these with Mr Putin and share our analysis and opinions. I hope that in the following hours, days and months we will see new trends that will allow us to have a useful discussion and move forward. There are also issues with security there. I expressed my condolences to Mr Zelensky over the casualties following an incident in Ukraine on August 4. We will talk about this in a few hours.

I absolutely agree with you that we should conduct the Normandy Four summit on the condition that we can really achieve tangible results and not just hold a meeting for the sake of meeting. We will discuss all the steps we can take on each side. Our protocol advisors' meeting will take place in a few days to prepare for the next Normandy Four summit.

**Vladimir Putin:** As for the Normandy format, I have really believed and believe now that any meeting, including a Normandy format meeting should bring concrete results. In my opinion, we should concentrate on what we agreed to in the past; we need to pursue these goals. For example, in 2016 we made a big compromise when we actually changed the implementation of the law on the special status of Donbass. At that time, former President Poroshenko insisted on changing it. The current president, and at that time foreign minister of the Federal Republic of Germany Steinmeier, offered a compromise proposal. We agreed to it; we accepted the compromise to implement the law on the special status of Donbass on a temporary basis on election day and on a permanent basis after the respective OSCE officials reviewed and confirmed the results. Well, we need to do this, to somehow arrange it.

The same concerns other issues, like amnesty and so on. There are several issues on which we need to come to an agreement. I believe we will discuss these, and we need to do it however we can. In my opinion, there is no alternative to the Normandy format and we certainly support it.

**Question** (retranslated): I have a question for each of you. Mr Putin, do you see France as a solid partner, more solid than during your previous five-year term? Do you think rapprochement is possible with Mr Macron's France? For example, membership in the G8 club, do you miss it? Would you like to return to the G8?

Mr Macron, you are getting closer with Mr Putin's Russia, while Mr Putin does not share your liberal democratic aspirations, while the crisis in eastern Ukraine deepens and there is a real humanitarian disaster in Idlib. So, what can France hope to gain from such behaviour?

**Vladimir Putin:** Regarding France's importance to Russia, France has historically been one of our key partners in Europe and the world. Together with France, we emerged victorious in the fight against Nazism in World War II, and I am grateful to the President for accepting our invitation to attend a ceremony marking the occasion next year on May 9.

But, of course, our relations with France have deeper historical roots. France is a permanent member of the Security Council, a nuclear power, and plays a significant role in decision-making regarding international security and, I believe, in Russia-EU relations as well. Of course, we understand and we are aware of EU decision-making processes, but France's support on a number of issues, including on the issue I mentioned earlier regarding Russia's return to the Council of Europe, played a significant, if not the key role. So, I believe there is no need to provide additional comments or proof that we take cooperation with France very seriously. I am not even talking about the economic side.

I already mentioned, but it bears repeating, that 500 French companies are operating on the Russian market. I assure you that this supports a large number of jobs in France, because French businesses supply many products to the Russian market. We support business activity in France. We could do even more if there were a full and comprehensive normalisation of relations between Russia and the European Union.

We are two nuclear powers; we are two permanent members of the Security Council. We must be able to find common ground. Even if we have differences on some issues, we still need to work together. Therefore, I would like to recall what Mr Putin said about liberal democracy.



Incidentally, as you know, when we talk about liberality, the meaning sometimes differs because there is also political liberalism. This brings us back to Europe during the Renaissance. Maybe, I do not know national history well enough. Maybe, I forgot the special ties that Catherine the Great maintained with our philosophers, our writers and our figures during the Enlightenment.

So, Russia has political liberalism, economic liberalism. As you know, every society is continuously changing, and every society has different levels of conservatism. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss and explain these notions.

I think that two years are insignificant at the level of our societies. This is why I believe we should make new efforts today to build a new architecture for European security for our countries. We will work on the climate agenda as well.

All this means that our two countries are major powers. Powers that have very strong economic ties. We also have common ideals; this is why our soldiers, our servicemen, fought together on the same side several times in history. This is exactly why I believe we should continue our dialogue. Naturally, we will probably be unable to resolve all our differences today but it has to be done.

Russia has special relations with the Western world. This is part of the Russian soul. But strictly speaking, Europe is not the entire Western world. We are part of it. Europe must simply revise its concept of sovereignty. It has allies and it must play its role in a world where Western hegemony is continuously questioned. This is why dialogue between the European Union and Russia is absolutely necessary for the European Union to again acquire its weight, to resume its role. This will take time. As I said, we will not be able to resolve everything today, but we will work on all this both today and in the future.

**Vladimir Putin:** As for the G8, which you mentioned, it does not exist. How can I return to an organisation that does not exist? It is called the G7 today.

Regarding a possible eight-country format, we do not reject anything. It was Russia's turn to host a G8 summit, but our partners did not come. We look forward to seeing our partners anytime, but within the G7 framework.

But there are other international organisations playing a noticeable and substantial role in international affairs. The G20, for example. They represent such major economic powerhouses as the People's Republic of China, India and many others. In all, there are 20 such countries, and you know them well. They account for almost 90 percent of the global economy. In this connection, such full-format venues clearly play a noticeable and substantial role – that is an objective fact – and we are working actively there.

We are also working actively in some regional organisations, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and BRICS, which includes a number of countries: Russia, India, China, South Africa and Brazil. I repeat, any contacts with our partners and in any format are useful, and we do not reject anything.

By the way, I would like to say a few words on a subject Mr President mentioned, namely, joint efforts to fight climate change. This is an important matter. Russia joined the initiatives of the President of France from the very outset and supported the Paris Agreement on climate change. We assumed very serious obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 75 percent of the 1990 levels in the next few years and to attain 70 percent levels by 2030. These serious obligations will require a substantial reconstruction of the entire Russian economy. We have adopted state programmes dealing with this matter, and we have set aside colossal resources. We take this matter very seriously.

The President of France has already mentioned developments in Siberia. I mentioned this when we were saying goodbye in Osaka, but record-breaking Arctic temperature changes are currently being posted. This has never happened before. These matters are very serious, and we have to coordinate our efforts here. All of us realise that there will be no effective results unless we coordinate our efforts. We are prepared for this joint work.

**Question:** Today, Mr Macron talked about Europe stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok. But I think you will agree that relations between Russia and the European Union are now at their low ebb. I have a question for both leaders: how do you perceive the prospects for revitalising the relations between Russia and the European Union after changes in the line-up of the European Commission? And to what extent is France interested in Russia returning to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and in improving relations between Russia and the EU?

On the whole, speaking of the G7, will you discuss the hypothetical transformation of the G7 into the G8 today?

**Vladimir Putin:** Regarding the prospects for creating a common Europe stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok, this was not our idea. It was General Charles De Gaulle who voiced this idea while talking about Europe stretching from Lisbon to the Urals. But Russia extends all the way to the Pacific Ocean, and this entire territory is European cultural space. It is important that we understand this.

And it does not matter that this seems impossible today. Anything that seems impossible today can become inevitable tomorrow. We proceed from this assumption. I believe that, if we think about this today, and if we set such goals, which are very important for Europe in the strategic long-term context (if it wants to preserve itself as a centre of civilisation), and also for Russia, and if we work on this together, then, sooner or later, we will come close to achieving this. It is important to choose a way in one form or another (it does not matter how) and to move slowly in the right direction, in line with the present-day conditions.

Speaking of the G7 and the G8, I have already said that we do not perceive this as an end in itself. We do not reject any contacts, and that is it.

**Emmanuel Macron:** Regarding your question, relations hinge on reality, despite the sanctions President Putin mentioned, because exchanges, nevertheless, have continued in various areas, and we have been able to broaden our economic and cultural ties. But relations between Russia and the European Union now serve as an irritant. The situation in Ukraine is such an irritant. In effect, the resolution of this conflict is a magic wand that will open the door for Russia to return to the G7 club, and the G7 can turn into the G8. I believe that efforts to find a way out of this situation meet the interests of absolutely all countries.

Now, as far as our bilateral dialogue is concerned, it shows that even if it is impossible to fully eliminate differences of opinion, we can still build something new on this foundation. It is obvious that the return to the G8 format and normal relations with the EU requires the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis.

As I said before, actions of all participants are necessary here. We need to go beyond temporary disagreements, situations and crises, in order to develop a new architecture. This is what we are currently working on. So, to summarise, the issue of the G8 format depends on the Ukrainian crisis.

But, on the other hand, to make everyone working on this agenda, that is, the development of an architecture of security and trust, we should be able to deal with our disagreements and misunderstandings that have accumulated in the relations between Russia and the EU in the past decade. We need to act, and to develop new formats and new platforms.

We do not have to share the same formats and speak the language that emerged a decade ago, because the world is constantly changing, time goes on, and we need to revise and reorganise it all. This is what concerns Russia-EU relations. I would like these relations not just to normalise, but to be reviewed completely.

Last question, please.

**Question** (retranslated): My question is to both presidents.

Many people were arrested during the recent peaceful rallies in Moscow. Mr President, how can you explain that?

And, Mr Macron, what is your opinion on that?

Also, a nuclear incident has recently happened in Siberia. There are rumours about high radiation levels in the air. So, what tests have been done and what did the experts find?

Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** We have to get the geography straight. There were no incidents in Siberia. If you are referring to the North Sea, this is a whole different region of the Russian Federation. It is not under threat in any way, and background radiation levels are not elevated. Experts were dispatched there, including independent experts, who have the situation under their control. In any case, I receive these reports from our experts,

including both military and civilian. We do not see any significant changes there. However, preventive measures were taken in order to avoid any unexpected developments. This is the first thing I wanted to say in this regard.

Second, the people who unfortunately suffered or died during the incident were on a state mission of critical importance. They will all be awarded state decorations.

As for the unrest in Moscow, this has to do with the electoral cycle. Elections to regional government bodies, including in Moscow, are scheduled to take place this September. During the preceding elections in 2014, 111 people were barred from running in the election when election commissions decided against registering them as candidates, which happened for various reasons and always in response to violations. This year, 57 people were not registered as candidates, which was once again attributable to obvious violations that took place in the course of the election campaign. There were signatures that were clearly falsified, according to experts from election commissions.

The legal avenue for settling disputes of this kind is to launch court proceedings, and there were precedents when candidates who were denied registration by election commissions succeeded in reversing this decision through court. There have already been precedents of this kind. There was a ruling regarding at least one person, and the court ruled that this person must be registered as a candidate.

As for the events themselves, I can hardly tell you anything new: according to applicable laws, people have the right to engage in peaceful protest, and the authorities must ensure that people are able to exercise this right. However neither the authorities nor any groups of citizens have the right to violate the law and carry the situation to the point of absurdity or cause scuffles with the authorities. This is against the law, and all who committed these violations have to be held accountable under the Russian law.

As we know, Russia is not the only country witnessing developments of this kind. I am visiting this country right now, so discussing this makes me a little uneasy, but since you asked I will have to say it.

We are all aware of the events related to the so-called yellow vests movement during which, according to our estimates, 11 people died, and 2,500 were injured, including

2,000 police officers. We would not like anything of this kind to happen in the Russian capital, and will do everything to ensure that domestic politics remains within the strict confines of the law.

**Emmanuel Macron:** Mr President is right to remind you of this situation, but I believe that we should nevertheless see the difference between the developments in our countries. [All] our countries are now witnessing various rallies, protests and manifestations. But what is most important? When one signs and ratifies certain agreements, one eventually has to fulfil their requirements.

We know that Russia has ratified a number of international treaties and conventions, under which it should guarantee fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of speech, the freedom of expression, the freedom of assembly, etc., to its citizens. Therefore many people were worried about the events in Moscow, including arrests and obstacles on the part of law enforcement agencies.

Mr President said that France also witnessed protests. Indeed, members of the public and police officers were injured, and I am very concerned about this. But France has always honoured its Constitution and all rights stipulated by the Council of Europe. Therefore all these people who appealed to the European Court of Human Rights will, of course, be heard. Naturally, we need to do our best, so that every person would have the right to express his or her opinion. But, as you know, these people who wanted to nominate their candidacies during the European election campaign were able to do this and to act freely without any obstacles. Of course, all this is possible, but one cannot put up with the fact that they violate public order because, in that case, they violate the rights of other citizens. We simply cannot put up with a situation when some citizens see their fundamental rights being trampled upon by law enforcement agencies. We cannot put up with this situation. Therefore we will discuss this matter together. People must be able to able to take part in peaceful demonstrations if they observe public order.

**Vladimir Putin:** I would like to add a few words. This is exactly what we are doing. Two mass events, rallies involving the people who wanted to express their protest this way were held in July and August 2019. These events were coordinated in advance and approved by the authorities. They were peaceful and took place without any excesses.

I would like all future developments in Russia and in other countries to proceed according to this scenario, that is, without any excesses or violations of the law.

**Emmanuel Macron:** Thank you very much, everybody. And now let's begin our work.

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