

# Joint news conference following a Normandy format summit

Following a Normandy format summit, Vladimir Putin, Emmanuel Macron, Angela Merkel and Vladimir Zelensky gave a joint news conference.

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## Press statement and answers to media questions following a Normandy format summit

**President of Russia Vladimir Putin:** Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

In principle, I agree with what the participants of these talks have said today.

We adopted a final joint document, which has reaffirmed the absence of any alternative to the strict observance of the Minsk Agreements signed on February 12, 2015 and highlighted the importance of launching a direct dialogue between the conflicting parties.

The participants in the talks welcomed the disengagement of forces and weapons in three pilot areas, as my colleagues have said. As we see it, this is indeed a major step towards a continued de-escalation in the southeast of Ukraine and a comprehensive ceasefire. We hope that the disengagement process will continue and that mine-clearing and de-fortification processes will be launched in the disengagement areas.

We also need to coordinate the reconciliation process in Ukraine with the political reforms that are stipulated in the Minsk Agreements.

First of all, the Ukrainian Constitution must be amended to formalise the special status of Donbass on a permanent basis. Of course, the duration of the agreement on the special status of separate Donbass districts must be extended and ultimately made permanent, as it is stipulated in the Minsk Agreements I have mentioned before. Certain amendments should be made to the agreement, primarily those related to the implementation of the Steinmeier Formula. There should be no delay in the implementation of the other commitments either, primarily regarding amnesty and a statutory ban on the persecution of persons in connection with the events that took place in the southeast of Ukraine.

The parties to the talks have supported the idea of coordinating the exchange of detainees based on the “all for all” principle.

It is important to increase the number of checkpoints on the contact line and to create the best possible conditions so that the hundreds and thousands of local residents, who have to wait in line for hours now, can cross the border quickly. We tend to discuss large projects and major humanitarian issues, but we must not forget about the people who live there, and all our agreements must be aimed at improving their lives not in a distant future, but now.

Ultimately, I believe, as we all agree, that this meeting was useful. I would like to express gratitude to President Macron for his initiative and to thank him and Chancellor Merkel for paying so much attention to this matter, which is not one of their direct duties, but they believe that it is important for all of us, for both Ukraine and Russia, as well as for our European neighbours. We greatly appreciate it that they are paying so much attention to this and doing so much to attain a final settlement. For its part, Russia will do everything in its power to contribute to these efforts.

Thank you.

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**Question** (retranslated): Good afternoon, Messrs Presidents, Madame Federal Chancellor,

Can we say this evening that a real thaw has started in Europe? Or is there still a risk that the conflict will continue? Will we have yet another frozen conflict in Europe?

Mr Putin, do you think we are witnessing a détente or thaw? Do you think that we can move forward towards real peace?

I would like to take advantage of Mr Putin's presence here in Paris to ask one more question. WADA has decided today to ban Russian athletes from the Olympic Games in Tokyo and Beijing. This is certainly a significant decision. Will you appeal it? Do you think, just as Prime Minister Medvedev, that there is a serious problem with doping in Russia? Thank you.

**Vladimir Putin:** Speaking about a thaw, yes, I do believe that it has started. What else can I say? First, there has been an exchange of detained persons. It has taken place. We have brought about disengagement in three areas. It has taken place. We have met in the Normandy format and discussed a broad range of very important issues, and we have achieved progress on many of them. It has taken place. Taken together, all of this is reason to believe that the process is moving in the right direction.

As for Russia's position, I said in my opening remarks that Russia will do everything in its power so that all problems are solved and all questions settled, and the conflict ultimately ends. However, I would like to point out that it is very important, as I have said before, that the conflicting parties talk to each other, that they engage in a direct dialogue. This is what matters. No conflict was ever settled without a direct dialogue between the conflicting parties.

Regarding doping, the WADA decision and Russia's potential appeal against it.

First of all, we need to analyse this decision. Here is the obvious part, which I can see immediately. For example, there are no complaints to the National Olympic Committee. If there are no complaints, the country must be able to take part

in competitions under the national flag, according to the Olympic Charter. This means that this part of the WADA decision contradicts the Olympic Charter. Therefore, we have good reason to appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

There are also some other arguments, but first our experts and lawyers should analyse everything so that we can talk with our partners competently. However, I believe that the main thing, and everyone seems to accept it, is that punishment must be individual and based on the acts committed by an individual, as it has been since the Roman Empire. Punishment must not be collective, that is, applied to the persons who have no connection with a given crime. Everyone is aware of this. I believe that the WADA experts are aware of this as well. But if they take decisions on collective punishment, I think this is a reason to believe that these decisions do not seek to keep sports clean but are based on political considerations, which has nothing to do with the interests of sport and the Olympic Movement.

**Question** (retranslated): Deutsche Presse-Agentur.

Madame Chancellor, you held a bilateral meeting with President Putin before the summit today. I would like to enquire whether you discussed during that meeting the assassination in Tiergarten, Berlin, because it had exerted a very strong influence on relations between Russia and Germany. One had the impression that Russia was willing to cooperate with the investigation into this assassination.

Mr Putin, you said two German diplomats would be expelled, and you announced retaliatory measures. When will these measures be introduced? How grave is the crisis in relations between Germany and Russia?

**Vladimir Putin:** You said that a Georgian national was killed. This is not quite true. I know that a man died in Berlin. And he is not just a Georgian, he is a man who took an active part in combat operations on the side of the separatists in the Caucasus. He is not an ethnic Georgian.

This man was on Russia's wanted list, and he is a very cruel and blood-smeared

man. He killed 98 people during just one operation he was involved in. He was one of the organisers of explosions in the Moscow Metro.

I do not know what has happened to him; this is a criminal milieu, where absolutely anything can happen. But I believe that it is incorrect to expel diplomats who have nothing to do with this matter, solely on the basis of preliminary conjectures.

You asked about retaliation. There are unwritten practical rules, unwritten laws for such cases: you have expelled our diplomats, we will expel yours. That is all. Is this any kind of crisis in relations? There is no silver lining to it, but I do not think that there is a crisis or that one should arise. But I agree with Madame Chancellor that we must investigate this matter. We will do our best to find out the truth and to help our German colleagues.

Incidentally, it would have been good if we had cooperated before these tragic circumstances occurred. The Russian side repeatedly urged our German colleagues to extradite this criminal and murderer. Regrettably, we failed to reach an understanding.

**Question** (retranslated): I have a question for President Zelensky.

It concerns the next Normandy format meeting, which is scheduled to take place in four months. Are there any preliminary conditions, so that we can see if there is any progress? Are we correct in understanding that although progress has been made regarding the exchange of “all for all”, no agreements of principle have been reached on the local elections in Donbass, which should take place in the autumn of 2020, and no final solution has been coordinated regarding the control of the Ukrainian border? Why is that?

And here is my second question: Will the problem of gas transit after January 1 be settled?

I also have a question for the President of Russia. Why are you so strongly against Ukraine’s desire to control the border with Donbass during the elections? Is this really a stumbling block? Can the settlement of this problem help to launch

the peace process in eastern Ukraine? Will you continue to offer explanations for the protection of Russian speakers now that Ukraine has a Russian-speaking president, who is also supported by people in the southeastern regions?

**Vladimir Putin:** Do you remember a popular children's poem: "We have gas in our flat. And do you?" And you do have it too, and will have it. But it may cost you much less if we agree to work honestly together. It could cost 25 percent less than the end consumers, primarily industrial facilities, are paying now. Because the price of gas for household consumers is subsidised, and we cannot calculate [export] gas prices based on this subsidised price. This is ordinary economic logic. This is how it is.

As for the border, Mr Zelensky and I have different positions on this issue. Our position is very simple: we stand for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. The Minsk Agreements say – you can read it for yourself – that Ukraine will be able to start restoring control over that territory, over that section of the border on day one after the local elections. This is what it says. And this process should end after the completion of a comprehensive political settlement. This is what the text of the agreement says. Why should the Minsk Agreements be reopened and revised? All the measures set out in that package are interconnected. If we revise one of them, this will lead to the revision of others and we will lose the agreements and create a situation where nothing can be done. This is our logic, and I believe that it is justified.

Regarding Russian speakers. We do want Russian speakers, and not only in Donbass but throughout Ukraine, to have equal democratic rights. I would like to point out that 38 percent of Ukrainian citizens regard themselves as Russian speakers. However, all of the so-called Russian schools will convert to the Ukrainian language starting next year. By the way, as far as I know, the other [national minority] schools – Hungarian, Romanian and Polish – are to start the process in 2023. As if there are more Hungarian speakers than Russian speakers in Ukraine. You must admit that this raises questions to which we have no answers.

But I hope that we will keep our focus on this issue, just as all the other pending problems. This is why we will meet in four months.

**Question:** RIA Novosti.

A question for President Putin. You spoke about the Minsk Agreements being inviolable and having no alternative. But Chancellor Merkel said just now that the Minsk Agreements are flexible. So have you ultimately reaffirmed the agreements' inviolability and their non-alternative nature?

**Vladimir Putin:** You see, any agreement has some degree of flexibility, because some things written on paper can be interpreted by the parties in different ways. And we did have a discussion today on some aspects of the Minsk Agreements. There are things spelled out directly, and it is quite difficult to argue with those. But there are other things, which emerged as compromises during our discussions in Minsk in 2015. And different parties interpret them differently. In this sense, I agree with Madame Federal Chancellor – she is right.

Well, this is what we meet for – to arrive at a common understanding, a single standard in what they call legal engineering. But I also agree that there is no alternative to the Minsk Agreements, and we must make every effort to ensure that they are fully implemented.

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