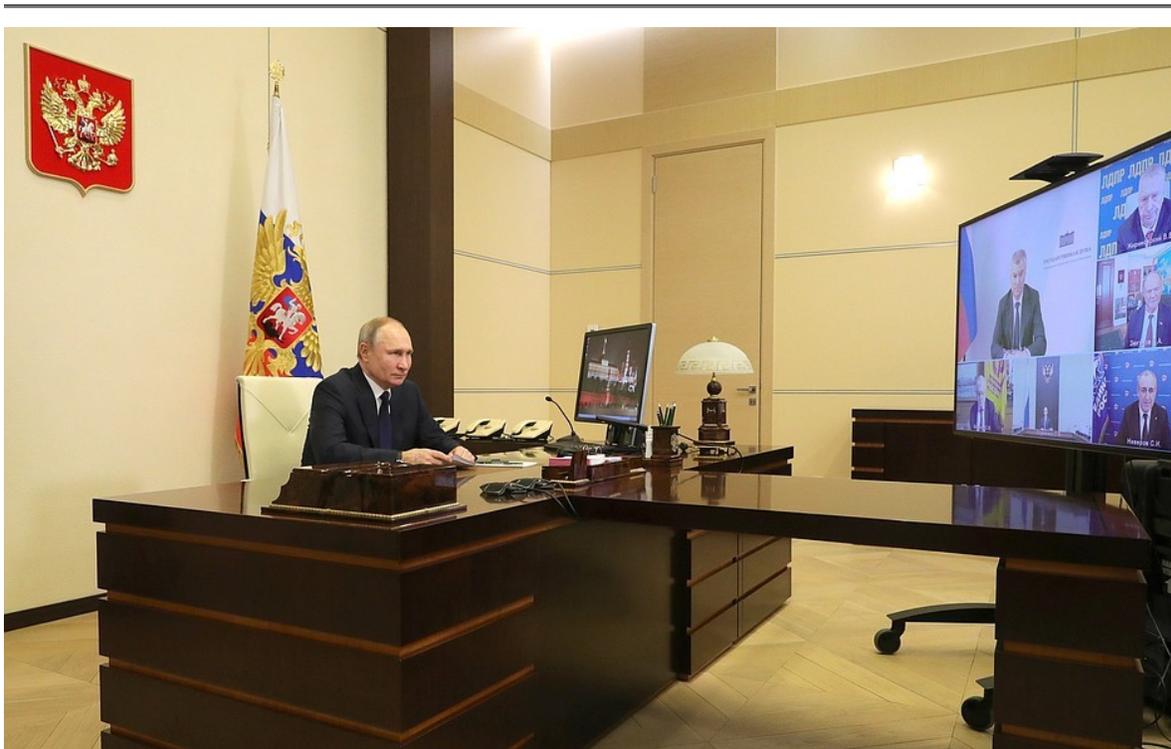


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Meeting with State Duma party faction leaders • President of Russia

24-30 minutes





3 of 5

Meeting with State Duma party faction leaders (via videoconference).

The meeting was attended by LDPR faction leader [Vladimir Zhirinovskiy](#), Communist Party faction leader [Gennady Zyuganov](#), leader of A Just Russia faction [Sergei Mironov](#) and leader of the United Russia faction [Sergei Neverov](#), as well as State Duma Speaker [Vyacheslav Volodin](#) and First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office [Sergei Kiriyyenko](#).

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Excerpts from transcript of parliamentary party leaders' meeting

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Good afternoon, Mr Volodin, colleagues.

Today we are holding a regular meeting with the leaders of the State Duma party factions. In accordance with the established procedure, I propose discussing a broad range of issues, which you yourselves consider to be relevant and important both for the national development strategy and the current economic, socio-political and social situation.

Of course, we will also hold a separate discussion on our law-making priorities, considering that this session will conclude the five-year term of this convocation of the State Duma.

First of all, I would like to say that all these years the State Duma has been working intensively and professionally. Despite

the complicated situation last year, you have not slackened your activity but even gathered momentum, adopting over 550 laws, which is more than the year before, when you adopted 530 laws, as far as I remember. At the same time, you held detailed discussions on each of these draft laws.

I know that there are currently over 1,000 draft laws in the State Duma portfolio, including extremely important, systemic ones, which must be adopted without delay to ensure the implementation of our economic programme, improve the business and investment climate, protect the labour and social rights of our citizens and, in general, strengthen the Russian state.

I am referring first of all to the laws that are designed to ensure the implementation and legal development of the constitutional amendments adopted at the national referendum. In fact, this amounts to an essential, detailed, and at the same time, very delicate adjustment of our entire legal framework and nearly all sectors.

Much has already been accomplished here, the Law on the State Council and some other acts have been passed, among other things. I would like to once again thank the deputies of all parliamentary parties for their active involvement in this work which has great significance for the people and the country.

I would like to say once again that you did not stop working even for a minute during the pandemic; I know there were losses among the deputies, but you constantly fulfilled your direct duty. I would like to ask you to continue to oversee all high-priority matters in the future.

We are all aware how important it is that everything works

as planned in real life, so that all new constitutional guarantees concerning demography, healthcare, education, culture, science and the economy incentivise the development of all these spheres, help improve sectoral legislation and, most importantly, their practical enforcement, and so that they become an unconditional reference point for legislators and all agencies, state-power tiers, and civil society institutions in their everyday activities.

I am confident that, in the next few months, you will organise your work in such a way that nothing is left for later, so that you pass a high-quality legacy to the new State Duma's members without any unresolved issues needing to be dealt with in the future.

I hope that specific plans of legislative work will be implemented on time in the course of joint work by representatives of all parliamentary parties.

Colleagues, the parliament's tasks require well-thought-out and painstaking work on the part of all deputies and senators; and they should also assess the situation in a balanced and objective way. However, I realise that the upcoming election campaign will inevitably lead to more heated discussions and whip up inter-party competition and political activity. There is nothing new here, this has always happened in this country, and this takes place everywhere.

In this connection, I would like to note that, of course, the federal parliamentary election has tremendous significance for Russia, for our state's sustainable and effective development, for the successful accomplishment of those highly important tasks that are reflected in national projects. All of them pursue the main goal of improving the quality of people's lives, elevating it to an entirely new, much higher level.

This direct request is an unequivocal instruction to all state-power tiers. Instead of merely waiting, the people are rightfully demanding tangible and visible results and changes. By the way, special heightened responsibility rests with the Big Four parties. While relying on the support of millions, they must set the pace for the future election campaign, conduct it in a constructive and substantive manner and demonstrate in-depth and mature discussions. Rather than merely, excuse me, quarrel with one another, they should show their approach and their national development options. And, what is particularly important, it is necessary to maintain dialogue culture even with the most irreconcilable opponents.

We all are interested in the elections being open, honest, decent and competitive. It is equally important for our major parties and for the public forces that are not represented in parliament but plan to participate in the elections. Most importantly, it is important for voters, undoubtedly.

It is they, our voters, who will determine the outcome of the election campaign. It is Russian citizens who will make their choice and we must protect this choice from any attempts at external interference. We cannot and will not allow any attacks on Russia's sovereignty and our nation's right to be in control on its own soil. I know that we share this approach and see eye to eye in this matter.

I believe that, as before, you will take a firm and uniform government stance. My opinion is that this patriotic unity is necessary, especially for the major parties with their own traditions, ideology and tangible influence in society.

This authority needs continuous maintenance, not only through cooperation with party supporters but also through a dialogue with those who are not politically minded or perhaps have views different from ours, and from the views of each and every one of you and your party structures; those who are critical. This is where your experience in parliamentary, public and political work proves indispensable.

I would like to finish my opening remarks here.

Now let us begin and share opinions in an open discussion as usual.

First of all, I would like to pass the floor to Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin. Then I suggest we hear from Gennady Zyuganov, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Sergei Neverov and Sergei Mironov. Then we will have time for an open discussion and talk about the most important and essential matters for the country, perhaps with each of you separately.

Mr Volodin, please.

Speaker of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin: Mr President, We have 1,222 draft laws in the State Duma legislative portfolio. It is clear that 2021 is a special year, given that elections to the 8th State Duma will be held in September. This obliges us to concentrate as much as possible on our work and to consider the bills that our citizens are waiting for.

Considering that one of the main items on our agenda is implementing the Presidential Address – it is of the essence to improve people’s welfare, the quality of life, and the economy – we are making every effort to implement the initiatives from

the President's Address to the Federal Assembly and provide a legislative framework for its implementation. In this regard, one of our main priorities is to adopt laws concerning the implementation of the Address.

We still have five bills to consider, of which four have already been adopted in the first reading, and we will reach 100 percent implementation of the Address in terms of its legislative support. Considering those 40 points that were designated for implementation by parliament, we still have 12 percent of the plan to work on.

The second item on our agenda, and another priority, is certainly the implementation of the new provisions and norms that Russians have supported by voting on the Constitution.

We have adopted 22 laws and amended 155 federal laws. We have five more laws under consideration. This is a lot of work, but we plan to complete as much as possible during our spring session, with the understanding that it is a high-responsibility task, concerning the quality of life as well as people's rights.

This is especially relevant now, when we can see foreign countries, primarily the United States with their satellites, trying to interfere in our affairs and influence politics, among other things. The decisions that we are now considering concerning amendments to legislation in accordance with the adopted amendments to the Constitution will allow us to more effectively protect our country's sovereignty.

Jointly with the Government, we have compiled a list of 39 high-priority bills for the spring session. Fifteen of them have already been passed in the first reading, with the aim of, by July,

completing work on those matters that have to be reviewed and approved first.

You have noted correctly that, politics notwithstanding (understandably, the election exerts its influence), but we should try to do our best to devote all the remaining time to addressing specific matters. Everyone here shares this task, although many formats are subject to change in connection with the pandemic, and we are doing everything possible to pass the laws that are needed by this country and to make the decisions that the people expect, despite all difficulties.

Quite possibly, it would be correct to note that, despite global developments and the latest US presidential election, considering the extent to which the world has changed and the fact that national legislation is not being implemented, we have to do our best to prevent similar developments in Russia.

Above all, we are referring to the situation regarding major IT companies that virtually annul the legislation of all countries and address freedom of speech matters at their own discretion. We have to protect these fundamental rights, and we have reached a consensus on this matter: We have to do everything possible, so that the people of Russia can freely express their will, and so that everyone can exercise his or her right.

Mr President, thank you for always finding the time to discuss matters that we see as highly important, despite your packed schedule, considering the fact that the Duma passes laws, and the President signs these laws that then enter into force. We therefore hope that, today, we will get answers to many questions that we wanted to discuss with you.

Vladimir Putin: Working on draft laws is always our collective endeavour. The President, the Government and the Presidential Executive Office make their contribution to the work on nearly every draft law. Overall, as I have said in my opening remarks, work proceeds in a positive and intensive manner, as we can see from the number of laws adopted and their increasingly high quality, which is very important.

What you have said regarding the so-called platforms, the IT companies, presents a major challenge, and not only to us alone. You can see what happened in the United States. This is a watershed running across the world as a whole, an ideological watershed, which is absolutely obvious. I have said this before, but I can repeat it now: if they behave like this in their own country, how will they treat others if they think themselves exceptional? This is a serious matter, and we certainly need to think about it in advance, this is the obvious thing.

As for freedom of speech, the situation is perfectly clear to us as well. The so-called double standards have manifested themselves so vividly recently that we have no doubt about how our so-called opponents will behave towards us, no doubt at all.

Just take a look at Ukraine, where three leading channels have been shut down at the stroke of a pen. And everyone keeps silent, while some have even given them an approving pat on the back.

How can we comment on that? The only thing we can say is that they are using these instruments to attain their own geopolitical goals. This is also true for Ukraine. Why are the developments pivoted on Nord Stream 2? They want Russia to pay for their Ukraine geopolitical project, that is it. In fact, this is a rather

primitive and simple thing. We have become aware of this long ago, but this is the world we are living in.

Or take a look at what has happened in Latvia. They have clamped down on 16 of our media outlets, but the only reaction to this is silence. Why have the Western truth seekers not provided any assessments of what is happening to freedom of expression there, in Europe? No, there are no evaluations, as if this is how it should be, because they are allegedly fighting propaganda. As if what they are doing is not propaganda. What is it then? This is an instrument of attaining their geopolitical goals, in this particular instance, with regard to our country.

We must take this into account. I would like to say once again that this is nothing out of the ordinary. I believe we have been observing this, seeing this happen for a long time, but the recent events have especially vividly confirmed the correctness of our views and assessments.

However, let us continue our discussion.

<...>

Vladimir Putin: *(commenting on Gennady Zyuganov's remarks)*

You have touched on a number of issues that are obviously very important. The growth of unemployment during the pandemic – it is not big but it is still here and we are seeing and recording it. I speak about this all the time and encourage the Government to do what is necessary to reach pre-crisis levels. In general, the situation is improving and has proven to be better than preliminary forecasts. But you are right. It is clearly necessary to focus on this all the time.

Of course, I know that the Communist Party is always concerned

over issues of privatisation. I have also spoken about this. Probably, our approaches to this matter do not always coincide, but at any rate I believe we share the common view that privatisation for the sake of privatisation is unacceptable for us, especially the way it was carried out in the 1990s in some areas. It must be beneficial for the economy; it must improve the economic structure. We must proceed from the premise that any step in this context must create a better, more efficient owner de facto, in practice rather than formally. But obviously, this must be done in a certain environment so as not to give away what costs millions and maybe billions for next to nothing. This is the bottom line for us.

When we talk face to face, I will be willing to discuss this issue in more detail. If you have some specific concerns in this area, I am ready to discuss them. <...>

As for the holiday (*Defender of the Fatherland Day on February 23*) – this is not just about a memory that we received from God knows where and not a victory that was achieved by some unknown soldiers. Our fathers and grandfathers earned this and spilled their blood to grant us a future. No doubt, we have always cherished and will remember this. Now we are looking into the crimes that were committed against civilians (*during the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945*), like genocide. This is perfectly clear. I believe this is the right direction.

My approach to this is well known. I have discussed it with you more than once. Of course, we must go forward, pool our efforts with other nations, including the European nations, despite all the difficulties and circumstances of today. The past must not pull us backwards.

But there are things that we cannot and will not forget, and genocide against the civilian population and the Russian Federation is a dark page, but it compels us to look with open eyes at current events and build our policy for the future to prevent a repetition of anything like it.

<...>

Vladimir Putin: *(commenting on Vladimir Zhirinovsky's remarks).*

Just a few words about family businesses. This is an accurate and interesting remark, and we have already discussed this. Indeed, there are small businesses and sole proprietors, and it is possible to organise family businesses based on the current regulatory framework. But you are right, there are things we should consider.

Food certificates. We have already discussed this, and the Government did too, in line with my directive. There are upsides to it, and there are certain issues that need to be reviewed, but we can absolutely give it more thought. It may not be as important now as it was at the height of the pandemic, but we can discuss this nonetheless.

You mentioned the development of universities. We are increasing support for regional universities in many areas mindful of the fact that we need good skilled specialists in Russia, so they do not concentrate exclusively in the capital cities, where they eventually run into employment problems.

You are a knowledgeable specialist on the Orient, including Turkey. As you have said, barbarians came from the East and destroyed the Christian Orthodox empire. But before the barbarians from the East, as you well know, the crusaders

came from the West and weakened this Orthodox Christian empire, and only then were the last blows dealt, and it was conquered. This is what happened... We must remember these historical events and never forget them.

Our national identity is a critically important matter that you always raise. I have recently discussed it publicly, and I would like to add something, because I believe this is a matter of fundamental importance.

You have just said there was nothing bad about the term the “Soviet people.” It was a unifying name, something that united the country. Today, we are living in a different environment that is free of ideology. The Russian people are a state-forming nation and they form the foundation of a multi-ethnic Russia. In this sense, the Russian people are interested in preserving the country where they are the main constituent force.

However, in order to preserve Russia, which is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, it is important for all ethnic groups, even the smallest ones, to know that this is their Motherland with no other for them, that they are protected here and are prepared to lay down their lives in order to protect this country. This is in the interests of us all, regardless of ethnicity, including the Russian people. If we look at it from this perspective, we will realise that Neanderthal nationalism under the banner, ‘Russia only for Russians’, is bad for Russians and Russia itself and rocks it from within, which we must do our best to prevent.

Given these circumstances, we must ensure that the culture of each ethnicity, its history and the origins of each ethnicity are respected and developed in our country, including the culture

and history of the Russian people, which is a unifying factor. We were able to achieve this understanding of the importance of shared living on a single vast territory in almost all regions. This is our greatest asset and common heritage, the common result of our joint painstaking efforts over the past several decades. We certainly hold this dear and will cherish this in the future as well.

Thank you for bringing up this issue.

Two important aspects mentioned by Mr Zhirinovskiy are, of course, “black realtors” and the sale of shares. It is necessary to look at this issue more carefully. I will instruct the Government experts to work on this.

As for demography, I have nothing to add in this context. You have said the right thing. I am referring to the need to take the babies from mothers who decide not to have abortions. These babies must be taken there and then. This is a difficult problem both morally and economically. Let us think about this separately. It is a very complicated issue, and it is not so easy to resolve it.

Of course, everything must be done to persuade a woman to keep her baby. This is the way to go. But I think this should be done a bit differently. It is necessary to simply help women, including those who bring up their children by themselves. I think it is better to follow this path and to allocate adequate funds to support a woman who was left on her own for different reasons. Let us not analyse these reasons now. As for taking the babies from women, opening children’s homes again and then resolving all the ensuing problems, I think this is a fairly difficult option and is hard to implement.

Migrants are a very important issue. Of course, we must work

on the labour market, providing jobs primarily to our citizens. You are absolutely right in saying that this is not a simple matter. You know all these problems from different sides, and this topic has been rightly raised.

But as for our partners, we are trying to do what you said. We are trying to develop within the EAEU the relations that would create jobs and make sure that our division of labour meets our own interests and those of our partners. We want to develop high technology and complementary cooperation. If they have great conditions for agriculture, especially for crops that we grow with difficulty or not at all, we must certainly use all these advantages. This is exactly what we are trying to do, including within the EAEU.

<...>

Vladimir Putin: *(commenting on Sergei Neverov's remarks)*

Of course, the volunteer movement, which we have supported in the past and will support in the future, is important. I am very pleased that it is not just expanding and attracting more people of all ages, of course, mostly young people, but also the fact that volunteers work in various areas. They go to places where their help is particularly needed, where people need additional support not only from the state, but from other people who care about certain issues and want them to be resolved.

The volunteer movement is based on these moral qualities, benevolence, and a desire to provide help freely to anyone who may need it. We will continue to do our best to support the volunteer movement.

Specific proposals were made, including on protecting minimum income from write-offs. It is imperative to look into this in detail

and see it through to the end.

Let us also work with the Government separately regarding the transfer of employment centres and determining their standards at the federal level. I will instruct the Government accordingly. Thank you.

With regard to pensions, this is a huge separate issue.

The Government has it under control. Thank you.

<...>

Vladimir Putin: *(commenting on Sergei Mironov's remarks)* You came up with a number of interesting proposals and ideas as well.

With regard to social matters: payment benefits on top of pensions for those who worked in rural areas and then moved to urban areas, we must look at this by all means, I agree. It does not matter whether a person lives in a rural area or not. What matters is that he or she had worked for a certain period of time in a rural area. We will definitely look into that.

With regard to the state taking upon itself the payment of alimony, I mentioned this myself at some point, and the Government had reviewed this issue. It is still on the table, but some experts are concerned that those who should be paying alimony will stop doing so altogether. Nevertheless, the issue is still under revision and is being studied at the expert level in the Government.

With regard to maternity capital, unfortunately, there is a lot of fraud with cashing it in. The more options for using it, the more loopholes for fraud. But this does not mean that we should not think about how to use these resources more efficiently. Let us think about this, too.

Concerning the provision of housing for orphans, there are many problems here, but some are of a purely administrative and bureaucratic nature, and we definitely need to give it more consideration.

The issues that you raised are important, I will definitely look into payments to military retirees and whether their pensions are properly adjusted to the developments in the civilian sphere. We did that before. I instructed the Government to look into it, but now, since you brought it up, we will return to it again.

Colleagues, we have had a very intensive discussion in this group, ranging from the Eastern Roman Empire to the present day and important economic, social and political issues. I have taken notes for myself. I will definitely instruct the Presidential Executive Office and the Government to work through these issues. I hope we will be returning to them during our current work so that all the issues you have raised are not forgotten and are resolved for the benefit of your voters, the citizens of Russia.

At this point, I suggest ending our meeting in this format and, if you like, and, as far as I can see, you do, I could discuss matters with each of you separately behind closed doors.

<...>