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## Vladimir Putin answered questions on the article “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” • President of Russia

15-19 minutes

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**Question:** Mr President, thank you very much for finding an opportunity to answer questions about your well-known article on Ukrainian issues. Here is my first question, if I may. Why did you decide to write this article at this particular time?

**President of Russia Vladimir Putin:** I decided to prepare this material a while ago, actually. I have been thinking about it for several months now.

The title of this material, or “article,” is just a convention because it is still a bit more than just an article. It is analytical material based on historical facts, events and historical documents.

Why did I have this idea at all? In our daily lives, we work, bring up our children, go for a hobby. As a rule, we do not think much about the issues in this article. However, the situation required that we look more attentively at the world we live in, who we are, and what relations we have with our closest relatives and neighbours. So, this idea came about in this context.

But why did I start it at this particular time? Because the conditions

that are taking shape are fundamentally different from what they were only recently. There is every indication that an anti-Russia agenda is being pursued, and of course, this is bound to be of concern to us.

Yes, of course, every country has the right to choose its own way, no question. But, you know, it is the same as with every person. He is free but there is a well-known formula: the freedom of each person is limited by the freedom of another person. If it contradicts the freedom of another person, it is necessary to consider certain limits and self-restrictions. The same applies to countries. If we see that certain threats are being created, especially in security, we must certainly decide what to do about it. And this is a sincere conversation on all the subjects I just mentioned.

However, there are also certain circumstances that compelled me to present this material today. After all, there are many people in Ukraine, millions of people who want to restore relations with Russia. I am sure there are millions of them. There are also political forces that advocate normalisation in this respect. But, judging by what we see, they are being deprived of any opportunity to implement their political goals. They are simply removed from the political scene through non-systemic, illegal methods. Some are simply killed in the streets, and then after this kind of crime nobody looks for the criminal. Or people are burned alive, like the tragic events in Odessa.

National media are closed and people are put under house arrest, like it's happening now with Mr Medvedchuk. Indicatively, the Ukrainian authorities take completely illegal actions that are even outside their competence. In other words, these forces are not given any chance for legal political work. This is another

circumstance that I consider to be very important.

And lastly – I would like to return to what I started with – it is essentially important for all of us to understand the current situation based on the historical context of its roots.

**Question:** Who is your article intended for, first of all, “them” or “us”?

**Vladimir Putin:** I do not divide people into “them” and “us.”

In the article I also write that we are a common entity, and so it is intended for all of us, including those who live in modern Russia, those who live in modern Ukraine and the sponsors of the current political leadership of Ukraine. They should also know what we are and what we think about each other. I believe that this is important for all of us.

**Question:** You mentioned one of the “time bombs” in the Soviet Constitution. Does this mean that there were other time bombs as well? What did you have in mind?

**Vladimir Putin:** I said frankly in the article that the most dangerous time bomb is the right of the Soviet republics to freely secede from the united country.

I would like to say that when the Soviet Union was born after the First World War, even the Bolshevik leadership was divided on that matter. I did not write about this in detail in my article, because I believe that such details would be superfluous. However, Stalin, who was responsible for this sphere of activities in the Bolshevik party, had major differences with Lenin. Stalin insisted on the principle of autonomisation during the creation of the Soviet Union, believing that all the other Soviet republics that were established in the former empire must be incorporated,

yes, incorporated, into the RSFSR.

Lenin had a different perspective. He spoke about the equality of all the republics, which should not be incorporated into the Russian Federation (RSFSR), but should establish new states on equal conditions with it. Stalin described this as national liberalism and openly argued with Lenin.

Incidentally, if we read some documents, we will see that Lenin's position was that Stalin was ultimately right, but it was premature to speak about that. And Lenin made concessions to the national republics, as Stalin described this. Stalin himself said that Russian federalism was a period of transition to socialist centrism.

Actually, this is what the Bolsheviks really did, because the Soviet Union, which was formally a federation, or possibly even a confederation if we take into account the right to secede, essentially was an extremely unitary centralised state. The right to secede was, of course, one of the time bombs.

And the second time bomb, which I also mentioned, was the leading role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, its directing and primary role. Why? Because it turned out that the party was the only thing that kept the entire country together as a single state. As I wrote in the article, as soon as the party started to fall apart from the inside, the whole country shattered.

There were other time bombs as well. Perhaps we will talk about this later on.

**Question:** You wrote about the anti-Russia project. When did it start and does it only concern Ukraine?

**Vladimir Putin:** Of course, not. The details are all in there.

The project started back in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was later exploited by the Polish national movement and, before World War I, it was used by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The goal was quite simple, as I wrote: divide and rule. Before World War I, Russia's potential opponents had a simple goal – to just weaken the country. They pursued this target vigorously, promoting the anti-Russia concept and separating part of one nation in order to make the rival weaker. Why the Bolsheviks had to pick up that concept and implement it when building a union, is not historically clear.

Perhaps, at the time it would have been more logical to bring the country together, especially because they believed it was a transition period. But they left it as it was and, unfortunately, the time bombs eventually detonated.

So, it all started a long time ago, during the Middle Ages, and it continues to this very day. They are simply recycling old schemes. History repeats itself.

**Question:** Would it be correct to say that the triune people are long gone and will never exist in the future?

**Vladimir Putin:** No, of course, not. You know, in the Soviet times there were attempts to eradicate religiousness among our people. Did they succeed? When the Great Patriotic War broke out, during his speech on the radio, Vyacheslav Molotov addressed the nation as "fellow citizens." But Joseph Stalin, who spoke after we all realised the looming catastrophe of the war started by Nazi Germany, addressed the nation as "brothers and sisters." This is what people call each other in church. Later, the patriarchate was restored. Today, the church plays its well-deserved role in society.

It is not gone; the triunity of our people has never been and will never be gone, no matter how hard they try using the same schemes as in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

I talked about this with the President of Belarus. He said that when he plays hockey and team members get angry because somebody makes a mistake, in the heat of the moment they shout: "Come on, don't you get it? Are you not Russian?" Phrases like this one come out without thinking, from the heart. There are millions of people like this in Ukraine, too. So, no, it is not gone and it will never be gone.

**Question:** Several months ago now, Zelensky made a statement in Russian and noted that everything had already been decided in Ukraine, and that it was going its own way. Do you think that this road will or will not intersect with Russia?

**Vladimir Putin:** This does not imply our intersecting paths but, rather, interdependent and interwoven destinies of millions of people living in contemporary Ukraine and contemporary Russia. This amounts to the historical and spiritual interweaving of our peoples that took centuries to evolve. What the incumbent authorities are saying has nothing to do with the people. The authorities are talking about their own personal choice. But this does not necessarily mean that this choice is final.

**Question:** In your article, you say that those who try and use people living on our historical territories against Russia will thus demolish their own country. Who are you referring to?

**Vladimir Putin:** Going back to your first question as to why this material appeared precisely now, I would address the matter from another angle. This material appeared following the drafting

and enactment of the law on indigenous peoples. I will repeat the gist of the matter. The law declares Russian people living on historical Russian territories to be aliens. In effect, the authorities are beginning to expel them from this territory. This is what is happening. So, this was one of the factors that motivated me to write the article.

As to whom all this is addressed to, and what I had in mind when I was talking about what we have just mentioned, I would just like to note one aspect: People living in Ukraine are unlikely to look calmly at incumbent rulers who gain power under certain slogans and who later change their colour just like chameleons and defend entirely different positions. As a rule, they defend the interests of their superiors and those financing their stay in power, rather than the interests of the Ukrainian people.

**Question:** President Zelensky said that he could discuss this article with you during a face-to-face meeting. While in Berlin, he talked a lot about Nord Stream and the need to discuss the gas transit topic at the upcoming Normandy Summit. What can you say about this?

**Vladimir Putin:** If they want to have a discussion, I think they should take a break, read the article carefully, analyse it and review some of the archival material. I think this is exactly what they will do and they will find something to talk about. When I say "they" I mean the political leadership of today's Ukraine. These debates have been going on for a long time now. It is hard to argue with this article because it is honest and it is in fact based on historical documents. They may be subject to different interpretations, it is true. But the basis for the article is historical archives.

What can I say about the gas issue? Russia, Gazprom, we signed a five-year contract to deliver a certain amount of Russian natural gas to our consumers in Europe via Ukraine. The Normandy format and other similar formats are political platforms for discussing the situation in southeastern Ukraine. They have nothing to do with commercial projects like Nord Stream or Nord Stream 2 or the transit of our gas through the territory of Ukraine. Despite all the current difficulties, Russia undertook certain obligations under this contract and will fully meet them.

**Question:** The Soviet Union included not only Ukraine but also Kazakhstan, Belarus and many other republics. Based on the article, which relationship model do you see as the most sustainable in the future?

**Vladimir Putin:** It does not only depend on us.

On the international stage, building a certain type of relationship even between the closest neighbours is always a compromise. It is not our goal to force anybody into adopting a certain model. We are looking for a compromise.

Here is what I mean: it does not matter to us how a neighbouring state – in this case, Ukraine – will shape its foreign policy and its roadmap. What matters is (and I said the same thing about freedom) that nobody creates problems or threats for us. What we see, however, is that military development of this territory is starting, which is worrying. I have expressed my opinion about this issue multiple times. And I think that our concerns will eventually be heard by those involved. After all, it is not Ukraine's doing. It is happening on Ukrainian territory and people are being used. I really do hope that our concerns will be taken seriously.



Regarding other countries, if you are hinting that it discusses the evolution of these republics – this republic in this case, then other republics also evolved in the same manner. Yes, this is so. But I have noted there that contemporary Russia recognises current geopolitical realities. We have recognised current geopolitical realities.

Naturally, we are worried about hypothetical threats. But we maintain allied and friendly relations like with Kazakhstan and many other former Soviet republics, we work with some of them on a bilateral basis in an absolutely friendly manner. We set up economic alliances with some of them. We also set up defensive alliances, including the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, or the Customs Union first and then the Eurasian Economic Union. We are not dragging anyone there. I repeat, we are looking for compromise solutions that create a situation that our partners feel satisfied with. This amounts to a complicated coordination process. But we are patient and search for mutually acceptable solutions that suit all of us. This is an ideal scenario.

See for yourself: The European Union continues to develop, and nobody compares it with the Soviet Union. Although I have already mentioned this, the number of mandatory decisions, passed by the European Parliament, exceeds the number of similar mandatory decisions, passed by the Supreme Soviet (Parliament) of the USSR. Nobody compares them with the Soviet Union. This is voluntary business. We will be completely satisfied if we can maintain friendly and stable relations even in a bilateral format. And we are ready for this, I repeat again, while recognising current geopolitical realities. The situation is even better if we establish relations similar to those we have with Kazakhstan

or Belarus, with which we are building a Union State, this is even better. We are also ready for such profound cooperation.

By the way, we are talking here about the Russia-Belarus Union State. This is not a state in the direct sense of the word but, rather, a certain level of integration. If we compare the Russia-Belarus Union State with the European Union, the EU boasts much more profound integration levels. These levels are much deeper. They have a common currency, an extremely powerful customs union, etc. They also have a common space and stipulate visa-free travel. We have so far failed to attain EU levels; at the same time, the EU countries completely retain their sovereignty. Nevertheless, this makes people's life easier, creates certain conditions for economic development and boosts our common competitiveness. If relations develop in this context, we will, of course, support such relations. We advocate this concept and we will work with all our neighbours and friends in a partner-like manner.

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