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Security Council meeting

65-82 minutes

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At the Security Council meeting.

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President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Good afternoon, colleagues.

We are meeting today to discuss the current developments in Donbass.

I will briefly remind you how it all started and how the situation has developed even though you know this very well. But we need general background to help us make appropriate decisions.

So, after the 2014 coup in Ukraine, part of the population did not accept the outcome. Let me remind you that this was an anti-constitutional, blood-shedding coup that killed many innocent people. It was truly an armed coup. Nobody can argue that.

Some of the country's citizens did not accept the coup. They were residents of Crimea and the people who currently live in Donbass.

Those people declared that they were establishing two independent republics, the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic. This was the point when the confrontation started between the Kiev officials and the people living on that territory.

In this context, I would like to point out that Russia initially did everything it could to make sure these disagreements could be resolved by peaceful means. However, the Kiev officials have conducted two punitive operations on those territories and, apparently, we are witnessing a third escalation.

See also

All these years – I want to stress this – all these years,

the people living on those territories have been literally tortured by constant shelling and blockades. As you know, the people living on those territories, close to the front line, so to speak, were in fact forced to seek shelter in their basements – where they now live with their children.

A peace plan was drafted during the negotiating process called the Minsk Package of Measures because, as you recall, we met in the city of Minsk. But subsequent developments show that the Kiev authorities are not planning to implement it, and they have publicly said so many times at the top state level and at the level of Foreign Minister and Security Council Secretary. Overall, everyone understands that they are not planning to do anything with regard to this Minsk Package of Measures.

Nevertheless, Russia has exerted efforts and still continues to make efforts to resolve all the complicated aspects and tragic developments by peaceful means, but we have what we have.

Our goal, the goal of today's meeting is to listen to our colleagues and to outline future steps in this direction, considering the appeals by the leaders of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic on recognising their sovereignty, as well as a resolution by the State Duma of the Russian Federation on the same subject. The latter document urges the President to recognise the independence and sovereignty of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic.

At the same time, I would like to note that these different matters are, nevertheless, closely linked with matters of maintaining international security, on the European continent in particular, because the use of Ukraine as a tool for confronting this country,

Russia, of course, presents a major and serious threat to us.

This is why we have intensified our work with our main partners in Washington and NATO over the past few months and in late 2021, so as to reach an eventual agreement on these security measures and to ensure the country's calm and successful development under peaceful conditions. We see this as our number one objective and a top priority; instead of confrontation, we need to maintain security and ensure conditions for our development.

But we must, of course, understand the reality we live in. And, as I have said many times before, if Russia faces the threat of Ukraine being accepted into the North Atlantic Alliance, NATO, the threat against our country will increase because of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty that clearly states that all countries in the alliance must fight on the side of their co-member in the event of an aggression against it. But since nobody recognises the will expressed by the people of Crimea and Sevastopol, and Ukraine continues to insist that it is Ukrainian territory, there is a real threat that they will try to take back the territory they believe is theirs using military force. And they do say this in their documents, obviously. Then the entire North Atlantic Alliance will have to get involved.

As you know, we have been told that some NATO countries are against Ukraine becoming a member. However, despite their objections, in 2008, they signed a memorandum in Bucharest that opened the doors for Ukraine and Georgia to join NATO. I have not received an answer to my question as to why they did that. But if they took one step under pressure from the United States, who can guarantee that they will not take another step under pressure? There is no guarantee.

There are no guarantees whatsoever because the United States is known to easily discard any agreements and documents it signs. Still, at least something must be put on paper and formulated as an international legal act. At this point, we cannot even agree on this one thing.

Therefore, I would like to suggest that we proceed as follows: first, I will give the floor to Mr Lavrov who is directly involved in the attempts to reach an agreement with Washington and Brussels, and with NATO, on security guarantees. Then I would like Mr Kozak to report on his findings concerning the talks on the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Then each of you will be able to speak. But at the end of the day, we must decide what we will do next and how we should proceed in view of the current situation and our assessment of these developments.

Mr Lavrov, please.

Foreign Minister [Sergei Lavrov](#): Mr President, colleagues,

As I reported to the President a week ago, we prepared our assessment of the proposals on the security guarantees that Russia submitted for consideration by the United States and NATO last December.

We received their response in late January. The assessment of this response shows that our Western colleagues are not prepared to take up our major proposals, primarily those on NATO's eastward non-expansion. This demand was rejected with reference to the bloc's so-called open-door policy and the freedom of each state to choose its own way of ensuring security. Neither the United States, not the North Atlantic Alliance proposed an alternative to this key provision.

The United States is doing everything it can to avoid

the principle of indivisibility of security that we consider of fundamental importance and to which we have made many references. Deriving from it the only element that suits them – the freedom to choose alliances – they completely ignore everything else, including the key condition that reads that nobody – either in choosing alliances or regardless of them – is allowed to enhance their security at the expense of the security of others.

In this context, I sent our Western European colleagues that are part of NATO, EU members, plus Switzerland, detailed letters with our legal analysis of the commitments that the OSCE assumed at the top level in 1999 and 2010, as well as within the framework of Russia-NATO relations, including the 1997 Founding Act and the Rome Declaration, that the participants in the Russia-NATO meeting in Pratica di Mare approved at the top level in 2002.

Our second priority concerns the time we established relations with NATO, in 1997. Considering that the 1997 documents declared that Russia and NATO were no longer opponents and were supposed, in part, to develop a strategic partnership, we suggested returning to the 1997 configuration of NATO forces on the eastern flank. This argument was rejected, like the first one. Indicatively, in their response, some NATO countries immediately urged us to stop “the occupation of Crimea” and “withdraw our troops from the territories of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.”

In general, these documents expressed support for the Minsk Package of Measures, but this support was absolutely “sterile.” It did not evince any readiness to compel Kiev to implement the provisions of this most important document.

In response to our other demands, including the need to rule out the deployment of arms systems that threaten us near our borders, the Americans expressed the desire to start discussing land-based medium- and short-range missiles. This issue emerged after the United States unilaterally walked out of the relevant treaty with the Russian Federation and ignored, Mr President, your initiatives of two years ago. At that time, you suggested replacing the treaty with at least a declaration on a mutual moratorium on deploying these systems with the relevant verification measures.

In the proposals we have received, the United States and NATO are also suggesting efforts in certain aspects of reducing military risks and on increasing transparency and predictability. These ideas are very close to the proposals we have repeatedly presented to both the Americans and to NATO. However, these issues were removed, separated from the context of the package agreement on security guarantees.

As for bilateral steps, the United States suggests regulating flights of strategic bombers, completing the work on measures to prevent incidents at sea and in the airspace over the sea. It is paying special attention to the transparency of surprise inspections, the resumption of contacts between the militaries, the creation of a civilian hotline, and a discussion of mechanisms to prevent dangerous military incidents.

Overall, our general impression is that our colleagues are trying to separate, as it were, Russia's proposals, to single out from them some secondary, albeit important for us, points that can help maintain the dialogue and risk reduction but that will not affect the vital interests of the US and its allies in their unlimited expansion of NATO, and that will not limit their freedom to define the configuration of forces in the NATO space and around it.

That said, and this is particularly important in the context of the issue that the President outlined today, the beginning of a dialogue on any issue is contingent on our preliminary steps to deescalate tensions around Ukraine.

In evaluating these responses, we can say that we see some progress. These openings are small but they do exist.

The consistency and principled approach that we have been displaying in promoting our initiatives since last December have, of course, shaken the United States and its allies and have compelled them to start working on many Russian proposals on the reduction of military tensions and arms control, which they ignored before.

As I reported to you, Mr President, in this context we believe it is necessary to continue this work. We responded in detail, in the spirit I described, to the documents from Washington and Brussels, but we have sent our response only to the United States for now, partly, primarily because we see NATO's role as ancillary since they would determine their steps mainly, maybe even exclusively based on Washington's policies.

By the way, at the recent Munich Security Conference, every Western representative declared their absolute commitment to a unified approach. That unified approach was developed by the United States, so Munich has simply confirmed that we need to negotiate with Washington. This is what we are doing now, sending the response that you approved to the American document.

We believe we have clearly emphasised the most important part – that our proposals are not an a la carte menu to choose from, but they are not an ultimatum either. They actually stem from the absolutely obvious point that the global situation can

only be resolved through a comprehensive approach at this stage. You, Mr President, have stressed that the Ukrainian crisis also largely depends on how relations develop between the Russian Federation and the West, led by the United States, so in our response, we underscored the integrity of the original Russian initiative.

We are also ready to discuss the matters that the Americans have recalled, including taking into account our previous proposals. But again, we will do this solely as part of addressing our main concerns: stopping NATO's eastward expansion and considering the configuration of NATO's presence on the European continent, primarily in Central and Eastern Europe, in line with the previous Russia–NATO agreements.

Naturally, our call is not a call but rather a demand, by and large, to explain why the assurances signed at the highest level that no one is to strengthen their security at the expense of others are now being ignored, and more than that, our colleagues from the respective countries are even refusing to explain what they had in mind when their leaders signed the relevant documents, and why now, regardless of what they had in mind, they are not going to fulfill their obligations.

Following your instruction, Mr President, we have sent these documents to Washington. A couple of days later, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called me to say he had read our document and was ready to meet to discuss it, convey the American reaction and possibly ask some additional questions. With your consent, the meeting has been scheduled for later this week, February 24, in Geneva. We will be guided by the approach that you have approved, the one you defend during the meetings with your colleagues, and which we will

certainly promote at the Foreign Ministry level.

Vladimir Putin: I am talking to my colleagues about this in fact, and my American colleague has assured me that they are not going to admit Ukraine tomorrow; moreover, even a moratorium is possible. But they also believe that Ukraine is not ready yet, so my answer was simple: “We do not see this as a concession to us; it is just the implementation of your plans. You believe you need to wait and prepare Ukraine for joining NATO.

A moratorium, but not a moratorium for us; you are announcing this moratorium for yourself. So where is the step towards us, to meet us halfway? So far, we have not seen this.”

I spoke twice to the President of France yesterday; actually, we spoke until 2 am this morning, so you could say we talked today. He insists that the US position has undergone some changes. But regrettably, he was unable to answer the question of what those changes are.

I think first we need to see what these changes are, if they exist at all, because your colleagues, to the contrary, publicly claimed as late as yesterday that there were no changes in the principal issues of expansion, of accepting new countries into NATO, including Ukraine. Do I understand it correctly?

Sergey Lavrov: Yes, Mr President, despite the multiplying publications of classified documents – and in the Western media at that – that were discussed by our Western colleagues in the early 90s both among themselves and with us; and even though they clearly indicated that even the West has no intention of expanding NATO to the east, confirming that in talks in a narrow circle; regardless of that, Mr Stoltenberg, the current Secretary General of the North Atlantic Alliance, is still rejecting obvious facts that have been declassified by a British archive

and published by *Spiegel* magazine.

Despite all that, they are adamant in not weakening their “open door” policy, even though you have explained several times that such a policy does not actually exist. There is the possibility under the Washington Treaty of proposing, with unanimous consent from the NATO countries, that a given country join the alliance under two conditions: if it meets the membership qualifications, and secondly, and most importantly, if that country can add a security dimension to the North Atlantic Alliance. We know, of course, that the second critical criteria has long been ignored by NATO.

As to what new ideas the Americans and their allies can offer, we presume that, as you said to President Macron, we first have to understand what the Americans mean. Because our French colleagues tell us that they have an understanding of what Washington can speak to us about. As you agreed with President Macron yesterday, I will have a telephone conversation with the French Foreign Minister today. When we were scheduling the call, I asked the French Foreign Ministry to make sure that he clarifies, even if just a little, what the Americans are ready to discuss with us as they hinted to the French.

Vladimir Putin: I see, thank you.

Take your seat, please, Thank you.

Now, Mr Kozak will report – as I requested – on any developments on the Minsk settlement track, let us call it that. And after that, I would ask the other Security Council members to speak out starting with the real situation, which is now unfolding in the Donetsk People’s Republic.

Please, Mr Kozak.

Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office

[Dmitry Kozak](#): Mr President, colleagues,

I will not bore you with the details of the difficult and extremely complicated talks on implementing the Minsk agreements. I will only say that today it has become absolutely obvious that Ukraine and its Western allies do not need Donbass on any conditions. Everything is being done to freeze this conflict and to shift political responsibility onto the Russian Federation. They have already persuaded the public at large, including Ukrainian and Western public opinion, that Russia assumes such responsibility, that it is a party to the conflict, and that this is solely a Russian-Ukrainian international conflict. They also want Russia to assume economic responsibility for supporting Donbass.

You are well aware, as many people are, that we have to spend astronomical sums on humanitarian aid for those territories. I would also like to say that everything that is happening in those territories is reflected in the latest statistics that we received today. Admittedly, we do not always act consistently. However, our measures and the Government's programme gave a boost to economic activity in Donbass, the number of jobs soared, and unemployment plunged. Today, the region is facing labour shortages, and the number of vacancies exceeds that of jobless persons 2.5 times over. Here is another fact: relocation incentives and the issue of Russian passports run counter to our economic goals. But this is just a comment.

Speaking of Ukraine, it is completely obvious that neither Ukraine, nor the West needs Donbass, they do not want to resolve the conflict; on the contrary, they want to freeze it. They go into a stupor when they hear any hypothetical questions on whether they would like to reintegrate Donbass

in Ukraine, so that the government of Ukraine regains control over it on some conditions. They do not know how to answer this question, and they simply keep silent and avert their eyes.

As far as Donbass is concerned, there is probably no need to explain the political and economic reasons that ...

Vladimir Putin: No-no, please, tell us about the negotiating process on the Minsk agreements and its current status.

Dmitry Kozak: Its status has remained at zero level since 2015.

Let me remind you that, in accordance with the Minsk Package of Measures, a dialogue on the future regime and the status of Donbass as part of post-conflict Ukraine was supposed to have started the day after the withdrawal of heavy weapons. This withdrawal was completed on March 8, 2015. The dialogue was to have officially begun March 9, while the amendments to the Constitution drafted during this dialogue and coordinated with Donbass, as well as a permanent law on the special status were to have entered into effect by late 2015. This should have been followed by local elections held in accordance with to this status and the settlement of the conflict, with the Russian-Ukrainian border subsequently put under Ukraine's control.

This is what should have taken place. But the dialogue never started. Ukraine has kept its notion of Donbass' status a deep secret. Obviously, the talks indicate that Ukraine views these areas as its ordinary municipal regions with traditional rights and authority, without any special status.

They have already succeeded in persuading the Ukrainian people that this part of the Minsk agreements is unacceptable. If such a precedent is set, with a certain territory with a special status, special authority and the right to language self-determination, plus its own police as well as its influence

on Ukraine's law-enforcement system, this precedent will be applied to the country's other regions as well. Such a demand for federalisation or autonomy of Ukraine's certain regions indeed exists, particularly in the country's western territories. They have convinced all of Ukraine of it, and they are going to pursue it.

During the Minsk negotiations and in other international formats, they claimed that they are committed to the Minsk agreements, but as soon as they leave the negotiation room, they publicly state that the Minsk agreements are unacceptable, they are a 'noose around their necks' and hinder the settlement of the Donbass conflict.

Vladimir Putin: As I have already mentioned, yesterday I spoke with my French counterpart once again. He claims that Ukraine's incumbent leadership is ready to implement the Minsk agreements and is even introducing certain new constructive ideas on their implementation, such as an election under the arrangement used for the election of German President [Frank-Walter Steinmeier](#).

Dmitry Kozak: I am saying once again that they have already learned lessons in the past eight years. They have often found themselves in a foolish and absolutely comical situation, and they are openly lying. And these Minsk Agreements, all the documents that have been submitted today by the Contact Group and in the Normandy Format are being interpreted differently. When they see the word "black," they say it means "white." I have repeatedly said that, maybe, some passages are written using invisible milk ink; so, let's use a hot iron to see the ink.

Here is the latest graphic example. On September 17, 2021,

they said Russia was a party to the conflict. We told them to write down that Russia was a party to the conflict, as well as obligations it should fulfil under the Minsk Agreements as a party to the conflict. They replied that they knew nothing about these obligations. I approached the Ukrainians saying that they considered Russia an aggressor, and I asked them whether they could formulate their position and thus help the Germans and the French. They replied that they would prefer the French and the Germans to do this. In the long run, the French and the Germans said that it would be better if Russia invented its own obligations under the Minsk Agreements, and that they knew nothing about them. Here is another example. I told them that, to make things easier for them, it was necessary to establish what provisions of the Minsk Agreements Donbass was complying with or not complying with. The thing is that Donbass adopted an offensive position and submitted a multitude of proposals on fulfilling the Minsk Agreements. They said they did not know what provisions Donbass was failing to comply with, that they were unable to formulate this aspect, and that Russia should invent something instead.

Vladimir Putin: Meaning we don't know what? We don't know what provisions of the Minsk Agreements Donbass is not complying with.

Dmitry Kozak: Yes, of course. They have no position on any matter. They don't know what obligations Russia should assume, and what obligations Donbass should fulfil or refuses to fulfil.

Vladimir Putin: Please explain once again about Clauses 9, 11 and 12 stating expressly that decisions should be taken in dialogue with ...

Dmitry Kozak: During consultations and discussions.

Vladimir Putin: During consultations and in dialogue with these republics. What do you have to say on this matter?

Dmitry Kozak: They believe that, contrary to what is written there (quite possibly, they had to bring the Cambridge English Dictionary to Berlin the last time), this requirement does not imply direct dialogue. Discussions and consultations do not mean direct dialogue between Donbass and Kiev on political aspects of the peace settlement.

Vladimir Putin: Do you mean that, in their opinion, the provision reading “during dialogue and by agreement” does not mean direct dialogue?

Dmitry Kozak: Yes.

Yesterday, President Macron told you that it was necessary to conduct this dialogue solely within the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group and under OSCE supervision. This, too, is a far-fetched problem because this dialogue is taking place exclusively within the framework of the OSCE-moderated Trilateral Contact Group. This is a far-fetched problem that does not exist.

All of Donbass’ proposals are submitted to the Trilateral Contact Group via the OSCE, and everyone is trying to discuss them under the auspices of the OSCE. But when Donbass representatives say anything, Ukrainian representatives turn away and do not hear them. When asked to reply, they say that they will reply if Russia asks them something. When Russia enquired as to when the Ukrainians would amend the Constitution under the Minsk Agreements (this took place about two years ago in Berlin), the very next day, Ukraine threw such a tantrum, claiming that Russia was interfering in Ukraine’s

domestic affairs, and that it was making categorical demands for amendments to be made to Ukraine's Constitution. "This is the sovereign right of Ukraine, and no one has the right to interfere in this."

Vladimir Putin: Do we understand you correctly that the Kiev authorities do not want to talk to the republics directly? They say they intend to do this in dialogue with Russia, but as soon as Russia suggests steps towards settlement as part of the Minsk Agreements, they throw a tantrum, claiming that Russia is interfering in Ukraine's internal affairs?

Dmitry Kozak: Yes, this is obvious. Absolutely. They are pushing us to respond and start suggesting something regarding political terms, and after that, they would begin accusing us of interference.

Vladimir Putin: Yes. And what about [their claim] that the Minsk Agreements should be interpreted in such a way that it is the current Kiev official authorities, rather than the unrecognised republics, that should introduce initiatives and proposals on how to implement the Minsk Package of Measures?

Dmitry Kozak: Yet another recent proposal that emerged in Berlin on February 10 was a specimen of legal cretinism. Since the case in point is Ukraine's legislation, the initiatives on amending its laws should come solely from Ukraine. All right, the initiatives are coming. But if the proposals or amendments to these initiatives are outlandish, like Ukraine's delirious proposals you were discussing with President Macron yesterday, and if Donbass suggests some alternative proposals, will they be considered? "We do not know," they say and lower their eyes. Obviously, this is the entirety of their latest tactics – they are showing their ingenuity. It is silly, awkward

and ridiculous, but they display it constantly, improvising new schemes as they proceed.

The gist of the matter is that no one can discuss Ukrainian proposals on amending their Constitution and laws because this is the sovereign right of Ukraine. If Russia wants to do it, this is a case of Russia interfering in their internal affairs, if Donbass wants to – they are separatists, who have no right either. This is the stand taken by Ukraine, which France unexpectedly supported yesterday.

Vladimir Putin: Do I understand you correctly that the key provision of the Minsk Agreements that all these amendments, including constitutional amendments, should be coordinated with the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, is being disregarded?

Dmitry Kozak: Yes, at this point it is being disregarded. Certain schemes are invented, schemes, as I said, belonging to the realm of legal cretinism, like “let us plant something in the Trilateral Contact Group; we don't talk to anyone, we don't hear Donbass; if Russia suggests something, we will see how to respond.” More likely than not, they will respond the way described by you and me. And later, the OSCE will allege that this has been coordinated within the black box known as the Trilateral Contact Group. This is a trumped-up procedure.

Vladimir Putin: Ok. Then I have what I can call a final question for this part. Tell me and our colleagues your opinion as to whether or not the Kiev authorities will implement the Minsk Agreements?

Dmitry Kozak: They will not – ever – if the developments follow their normal course. Let me reiterate: as is obvious, they do not want, either with Minsk, or without Minsk to bring Donbass back

into Ukraine.

Vladimir Putin: Ok.

Dmitry Kozak: It is useful.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you, all right.

Dmitry Kozak: Mr President, now or later? I just wanted to answer the question about whether or not to annex Donbass; what we should do about this later and how to use it at talks with the West, because this is a very serious problem.

Vladimir Putin: Let us now confine ourselves to your remarks...

Dmitry Kozak: Ok. But later, I think, we will discuss it separately.

Vladimir Putin: Mr Kozak, we will confine ourselves to your remarks on the negotiating process within the framework of the Minsk Agreements and to your assessment of prospects. We have understood that, in your opinion, there are no prospects for the development of the negotiating process within the framework of the Minsk Agreements.

Thank you.

(Addressing Alexander Bortnikov.) Now I would like to ask Director of the Federal Security Service, Mr Bortnikov, to report on the situation at the border, including with regard to border officers recording the number of people crossing our border, refugees, and on developments at the border.

Director of the Federal Security Service [Alexander Bortnikov](#): Mr President,

We can see that the situation is deteriorating in the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics. We see that shelling is intensifying, threatening primarily the lives of civilians. Because

of these circumstances, refugees have started moving towards the Russian border, and as of 9 am this morning, around 68,500 civilians had entered Russia from the DPR and LPR, according to statistics provided by the border service.

First, we are maintaining direct contact with representatives of the government bodies in the regions that are dealing with refugees.

Second, we can see that, as a result of intensified shelling by Ukrainian forces in the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, there have been shells landing in the Russian Federation, first of all, in the Rostov Region. Given this circumstance, the Federal Security Service and the Russian Investigative Committee are carrying out the necessary operative investigative measures.

Last night, two Ukrainian sabotage groups approached the border with Russia in the Lugansk region and Mariupol. As a result of the battle fought by our border troops, supported by the Defence Ministry, these two sabotage groups were destroyed. One military of the Ukrainian troops was captured. Further steps are being taken.

Overall, the situation at the border on our side is stable. We are monitoring the border and providing military reinforcements, including to the Border Service. We are working together with law enforcement agencies and the Defence Ministry.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

Mr Shoigu, I know that the Defence Ministry is monitoring the situation in the conflict zone. Please report.

Defence Minister [Sergei Shoigu](#): Mr President, colleagues,
Reporting on latest developments, more than 107 shelling

incidents were reported between February 19 and 20, including over 70 by heavy weapons, 122-mm weapons and mortar guns.

Due to the activity of both the sabotage groups and artillery in Donetsk, the city has been left practically without water.

Around 90 percent of the city has no water supply.

As for Lugansk, two-thirds of the city has no gas. In fact, all people living at the contact line have been forced to evacuate.

A small segment of the population that has to stay and work there, at continuous cycle facilities, has been affected, unfortunately. Literally today, a miner was killed at a bus stop by an artillery round.

In the past 24 hours or overnight, to be more precise, more than 40 shelling incidents were reported across all areas, in total, in a single night. Based on our data and expert reports, we believe that the attacks are not random but targeting specific sites. It is fire for effect. They understand what they are hitting.

Mr President, in this context, I would like to briefly report that as of today, a total of 59,300 troops are concentrated at the border with the Lugansk and Donetsk regions from the Ukrainian side.

As a result of your negotiations and lengthy talks on security measures, troops and heavy arms (especially heavy arms) were supposed to be withdrawn from the contact line to shooting distance, in order to prevent fire from reaching populated areas. Today, we can see troops being concentrated and heavy weapons returning to their previous positions.

What is the current situation? They have 59,300 troops, Tochka-U launchers, 345 tanks, 2,160 armoured vehicles, 820 artillery guns and mortar launchers, and 160 multiple-launch rocket systems, including Smerch.

I cannot help but point out that these forces do not include those nationalist battalions that have been talked and written about so much and which, based on our completely objective data, are poorly controlled by the country's leadership and commanders on the ground. Naturally, they act as they see fit – hence the sabotage groups that break through in different locations and commit terrorist attacks such as blowing up vehicles, damaging power lines, substations, gas pipelines and more.

Outside the context of the developments in the Lugansk and Donetsk regions, I would like to draw the Security Council members' attention to Mr Zelensky's statement in which he said that Ukraine wants to regain its status as a nuclear power. "Power" may not be the right word. A nuclear country.

This is extremely dangerous for several reasons. First, over the long years when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union, resources were created in Ukraine to build both nuclear weapons and launchers. By the way, since tactical and nuclear weapons are based in Germany, the same weapons could easily emerge in Ukraine as well – using existing launchers. I mentioned Tochka-U. Its launcher is easily compatible.

They possess the equipment and technology and they have specialists who, in our estimation, have capabilities far greater than those of Iran and North Korea – the countries which are discussed at all levels in the context of agreements on their de-nuclearisation.

Then, there are those nationalist battalions scattered all over Ukraine. I think it is no secret that they are to a great extent in control of the situation in specific locations, cities and regions of Ukraine. I am talking about extremely radical nationalist views, extremely radical calls concerning Donetsk, Lugansk,

Crimea and, of course, our country.

The overall situation is extremely tense. Since February 14, we have noted a more active phase and efforts to bring forces to the highest level of combat readiness. It means that considerable and more serious provocations are in the making or at least they are preparing to deal with the Donbass issue with the use of force. This has been indicated by changes in the deployment of heavy machinery and artillery guns, and changes in radio frequencies used for their communications. Then, of course, there is everything connected or connected in the first place with frontline activity – I am talking about shelling. It has been a long time since anything like this happened. We are very close to the 2014–2015 situation.

Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

Colleagues,

I think we are all aware of the status of the negotiating process on the Donbass settlement. It has been described in sufficient detail by the Federal Security Service Director and the Defence Minister.

We need to give an answer to the question that was raised a long time ago and is included in the State Duma's appeal to the head of state. This question concerns recognising the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic.

We see the threats and blackmail coming from our Western colleagues, and we understand where this step stems from, but we understand the situation at hand as well.

Mr Medvedev.

Deputy Chairman of the Security Council [Dmitry Medvedev](#):

Mr President, colleagues,

The President and the speakers have just described the overall situation related to ensuring our country's security. I am referring to NATO and the United States' attempts to definitively redraw the map of the world in their favour, advance to our borders and practically put us in a hopeless situation. These are, in fact, the red lines the President spoke about at various forums and meetings.

Speaking about the situation surrounding the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic, it is quite clear – at least, I think so, and our colleagues have just confirmed this in their remarks – essentially, Ukraine does not need these territories. In any case, they are a bargaining chip in the tug of war over the status of Ukraine. The residents of these territories have not received any support or assistance from the Ukrainian authorities for many years now. On the contrary, they are subjected to mass reprisals, such as shelling attacks, depriving them of basic amenities and violating basic human rights.

Overall, based on the unfolding developments, we can conclude that the package of measures included in the Minsk Agreements will not get implemented. Moreover, for obvious reasons, even with pressure from foreign countries such as France and Germany, in all likelihood, the current Ukrainian regime, namely the incumbent President, does not need this implementation, since it will prevent him from being re-elected to the post of president, which is what he wants more than anything else in the world.

So, he is not interested in complying with the existing

agreements which you, Mr President, just mentioned, when both he and his National Security and Defence Council Secretary are openly saying that these are harmful agreements, and then keep pulling the wool over our Western colleagues' eyes during personal meetings or telephone conversations as they issue ritual statements about their willingness to implement these very Minsk agreements.

We are facing a complex dilemma regarding the recognition of these two territories, which are ready to seek such recognition, and which have made the corresponding requests to us. Our parliament has adopted a resolution to that effect as well.

I remember 2008 quite well, so I can speak based on some experience, since I had to make a difficult decision to recognise South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent subjects of international law, that is, to give them, at least from our point of view, international legal standing. We know what happened next. I am not going to talk about this now. There is a vast number of difficulties, and there are problems. All the while, it is quite clear that it made it possible, let us face it, to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who live within this territory, and, to a certain extent, it was a lesson for NATO and a number of European countries, a lesson that no one can do this to the Russian Federation.

Today, the situation is much more complicated, but in some ways, maybe even simpler. I will explain. It is more complicated, because the scale of the potential conflict is incomparable to what we dealt with in 2008. This is absolutely so based on the analysis that has just been carried out by the Defence Minister. On the other hand, in some ways it is easier for us, because back then we did not know what the response would

be. There were all kinds of conversations. I had conversations, and Mr Putin talked with President Bush as well. Now we know what will happen, we are aware of all the problems and difficulties, as well as the proposals concerning sanctions, which are being repeatedly, from all directions, so to say, broadcast to us.

We understand that the pressure will be overwhelming, but we understand how to resist this pressure. In this sense, I think the bitter experience of the past 14 years was beneficial for us.

This experience showed that it will be difficult for us. Here, I will give my personal assessment – but after a while, with skilful management of the situation, and, I emphasise, I think we have learned how to do this under the leadership of the President – the tension that is now vibrating around our country will subside one way or another. Not quickly, not all at once, but this is how human history works: sooner or later, they will get tired of this situation and will themselves ask us to resume discussions and talks on all issues of ensuring strategic security.

Here, you know, it is like that line from the famous book by Bulgakov: never ask for anything, they will come to you themselves and offer everything. This is about how developments unfolded in 2008–2009. They came to us and suggested resuming relations across the board. Let us face it, Russia means a lot more than Ukraine for the international community and our friends in the United States and the European Union, and everyone understands this, including the Ukrainians.

So, of course, we always need to avoid sensitive issues, but still, the rules of the genre are such that after a while, most likely, the situation associated with the recognition

of the respective territories will start cooling down. We know this from previous experience.

I would like to point out something that has not yet been discussed today. An elementary but also extremely important matter. About 800,000 citizens of the Russian Federation are currently residing within the borders of these two unrecognised entities. Mr President, I am not even talking about the Russian world, which we take care of, help and support in every possible way, but citizens of the Russian Federation. Citizens who live in another country. They are our people. I want to emphasise that they are not only people who speak Russian, they are citizens of our country. Everyone is aware that, for example, when US citizens run into any problem at all, when just one is abducted somewhere, the Americans conduct special operations. I think that we, as the Security Council members, cannot ignore this fact.

So, I think that if the situation follows the path that I just laid out and there are no signs of improvement in sight, then the only way out of this situation in this case will be to recognise the legal standing of the respective territories, which is entirely within the purview of the President. Judging by the signs that we are now seeing, in all likelihood this situation will not improve.

You said, Mr President, I think it is crucial for our society, the citizens of our country, to express the appropriate sentiment, since we all live in the same house, and all this is connected with major processes and the military component. But, as far as I know, the vast majority of citizens of our country would support such step.

Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

Mr Medvedev, and I want to say this to all of you now: each of you knows that I did not discuss anything with anyone in advance. I want to emphasise this. I did not ask for your opinion in advance. What is happening now is happening, so to say, unrehearsed, because I wanted to know what your opinion is without any prior preparation. I believe this to be very important, and I would like the State Duma Speaker to express his opinion on this issue.

Mr Volodin.

State Duma Speaker [Vyacheslav Volodin](#): Mr President, colleagues,

The State Duma has taken a decision and, Mr President, we have appealed to you about it. This decision was not spontaneous, as it was thoroughly studied and weighed and we had several versions, however, the majority – 351 out of 450 Parliament members – voted in favour of sending the President a request to recognise the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic. The Parliament members who supported another version were of the same opinion but they proposed to first forward the draft resolution to the Foreign Ministry and other governmental bodies.

We believed the situation in the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics was critical and our decision was primarily prompted by humanitarian considerations because people were dying and there was no end to it.

Parliament members believe that Kiev has deliberately engaged in foot-dragging and sabotaging the Minsk Agreements. It is unacceptable. Of course, when taking this decision, we were cognisant of the fact that our citizens, our compatriots live there. One million two hundred thousand people have applied

for Russian citizenship. About 800,000 people have been granted Russian citizenship but many more are still seeking to acquire it. So, our first priority is defending citizens of our country, our compatriots.

We are also guided by the consideration that the situation has not changed in eight years. More than that – despite even the involvement of the representatives of other countries in the efforts to resolve this issue, Kiev has sabotaged all the obligations it assumed earlier.

This is why, Mr President, we are asking you to consider the State Duma's appeal and recognise the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

Ms Matviyenko.

Speaker of the Federation Council [Valentina Matviyenko](#): Mr President, colleagues,

For seven years now, a humanitarian catastrophe has been unfolding before our eyes in the centre of Europe. All these years we witnessed genocide, blockade, non-payment of pensions and benefits, and shelling. For seven years, Russia has consistently advocated at all levels for a political and diplomatic solution to the internal Ukrainian conflict, in fact, for putting an end to the civil war, at all platforms, including through parliaments. Nobody heard us.

The alleged implementation of the Minsk Agreements was nothing but going through the motions. The endless meetings of the Contact Group were pointless and useless. And it became clear that the Kiev puppet regime not only did not want to but was unable to bring any solution to it. After all, look, at the snap

of [President] [Biden](#)'s finger, the prosecutor general was removed from office that same day. In the same way, if they wanted this conflict in Ukraine to end, all they had to do was direct the Kiev government accordingly, and it would have immediately sat down at the negotiating table and fulfilled the Minsk Agreements.

Ukraine needs this conflict in order to somehow justify the worsening economic and social situation, as it attributes everything to an alleged war. The West needs this conflict as an anti-Russian project, where Ukraine is just a bargaining chip – it thinks not about its national interests, but rather about how to please its handlers. That is why the Minsk Agreements have not been implemented.

Let us remember what the residents of Lugansk and Donetsk wanted. They were called separatists and terrorists. They said: give us economic autonomy, we are tired of feeding Kiev, and give us the right to speak our native Russian. The usual demands, the usual European values that everyone is talking about at length.

Instead, there were two attempts at an armed seizure of the territory with a large number of fatalities and an organised humanitarian disaster. Where is the OSCE? Where are the guarantors who signed the agreement prior to the coup?

The heads of Germany, France and Russia got together and adopted decisions. Not a single attempt was even made to act on them. The Steinmeier formula seemed to be a straightforward document laying out a sequence of actions.

You see, for Ukraine it is just territory, whereas for Russia, for us, these people are citizens and human beings: Russians, Russian speakers, or Ukrainians, it doesn't matter.

And the worst thing the West is doing is trying to pit the two Slavic fraternal nations against each other. The residents of Donetsk and Lugansk have become hostages to this anti-Russian project.

How much longer can we try to talk sense into them? How much longer can we explain things? Ultimately, you have to come up with a decision. We had enough patience and enough arguments to have Ukraine comply with the Minsk Agreements and to follow a peaceful, diplomatic path. Clearly, this is not part of their plan. They do not want to do so and will not. We must call a spade a spade.

The residents of Lugansk and Donetsk rebelled against the bloody anti-state coup when the first draft law submitted to the Rada was the draft law abolishing the Russian language. Our partners are saying that, indeed, the Minsk Agreements must be complied with since they are an international document adopted by the UN. But instead of forcing Ukraine to do so, they are wagging their finger at us all the time and threatening us with sanctions, instead of forcing, so to speak, Ukraine to peace. Instead, they are conducting the military development of Ukraine and supplying all types of weapons there, including offensive weapons. Does it occur to them that nationalists, or Bandera followers, which is the right way to call them, might come to power there tomorrow and use these weapons? Will that add stability to Europe? Is this the way to peaceful and stable development in Europe?

It seems to me that this has already become simply a moral duty for us in Russia. You know, I just cannot watch these videos and I think the majority feels the same. Poor women, elders that are weeping and children who are sitting in basements and taking their classes, and the entire international community

is looking at all this through a blindfold. It is impossible to talk about any European values after this. This is inhuman and immoral. I will say it again – it is impossible to tolerate this any longer. It is necessary to make a decision. If recognition of the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics would resolve this problem, and this is obvious, it means we must take this step.

Threats of sanctions are, of course, painful and unpleasant but, look, we are called the aggressor and yet we have never announced sanctions against Ukraine. We, along with Belarus, continue supplying it with electricity and petrol that is used to fuel tanks bound for the border with the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics. We supply gas and many other things. Therefore, I believe it is time to make a decision without delay.

Mr President, I would like to say just a few words, maybe I am too emotional and please excuse me but what harm has Russia inflicted on Ukraine in the 30 years of their separate existence as independent states? What harm has it caused?

We supplied it with almost free gas. We did not interfere in its affairs unlike the United States that said it had spent US\$5 billion on regime change. We kept out. The United States wanted Yushchenko to be elected illegitimately in the third round, and he was. We did not influence the elections and did not interfere in them – we wanted the Ukrainians to elect their president themselves.

During all these 30 years, the illegal transfer of Crimea and Sevastopol to Ukraine was never on the agenda. Yes, we felt bad about this; it stung. We knew that over 200 years ago, Catherine the Great decreed that Crimea and Sevastopol can join the Russian Empire of their own free will. Remember that

the Black Sea Navy has been based there for over 200 years, that is, for longer than some states have existed. Yet, we did not raise this issue even once.

We were compelled to defend the people because the Banderite units were moving ahead. Even such acts of intimidation as the shooting of unarmed police on Maidan and the burning of people in Odessa would have paled. It is hard even to imagine what they could have done in Crimea and Sevastopol. This is why Russia supported the free choice of Crimea and Sevastopol. So, recognise this fact! We acted strictly in accordance with the UN Charter where the right of nations to self-determination overrides everything else. There is a ruling of the UN Court on Kosovo and the like. All these arguments are well known.

Yes, they wanted to see a NATO flag in Sevastopol instead of the flag of the Russian Black Sea Fleet but we have no moral right to allow this. This is why this issue is closed altogether. This must be recognised.

I believe it is time to make a decision. It is simply immoral to continue discussing it to death and dragging it out, while pretending that something is being done.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

Mr Patrushev.

Secretary of the Security Council [Nikolai Patrushev](#): Mr President, colleagues,

The issue we are discussing today is extremely pressing but let me take a broader view of it.

In its doctrinal documents, the United States calls Russia an enemy, just like China, and practically everywhere they are

operating from this standpoint.

I would also like to emphasise that we are saying we are holding talks with NATO, the OSCE, the European Union, and the leaders of European countries. Talks must be held, but talks must be held with the United States. Everyone else will do as the United States says, including NATO, the OSCE, the European Union, and so on. So, the United States should be the main negotiator that we engage with.

Look, Mr Lavrov is saying they want to set up a meeting between President Biden and President Putin. They are not saying what they want to discuss. Just a meeting to be able to say that we maintain a dialogue and so on. We have no need for talks for their own sake. We need to achieve specific goals. They are hiding their specific goal, which is none other than the collapse of the Russian Federation. Our goal is to protect our country's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

With regard to the conflict in Ukraine and related developments, everyone is aware and convinced this was not organised by the people of Ukraine. The people of Ukraine are against this. They are intimidated and forced to follow this path. It was manufactured by the United States, just like during the conflict with Georgia in 2008, when the decisions were made. So, the United States is the only country to talk with.

With regard to the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic, the people have had enough, and continuing to torture them is not an option. The [State] Duma made an absolutely right move to adopt these decisions. I understand that we must support the decision that the Duma recommends that you, as President, adopt. I think that if we do this, we will protect the people who live there, and we should take care

precisely of this, and give them the opportunity to work in peace. To reiterate, what is happening there is a local conflict orchestrated by the United States.

Therefore, I motion that it would be advisable to accept the proposal of the American side, President Biden's proposal to have talks during which it would be possible to say that “you did everything you could to harm the people of the Lugansk People's Republic and the Donetsk People's Republic, and we must support them. If you can stop this bloodbath soon – say, two or three days – we will maintain a dialogue with you. Then, let the people make progress, and let them agree and implement not the “road map” of the Minsk Agreements, but a plan so that there is a tight deadline for each item.” But I am convinced that the answer you receive will be negative, they will not agree with you. So, recognition is the only option.

Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

Mr Mishustin.

Prime Minister [Mikhail Mishustin](#): Mr President, Security Council members,

We have been preparing for months for a potential response to the recognition of the DPR and the LPR. I am primarily referring to import substitution and an analysis of all risks that we may face if we adopt these decisions. We have thoroughly reviewed these risks and we understand the issues linked with restrictions on the import of high technology and many other problems. We have also established relevant groups in our ministries and departments under the guidance of the Finance Ministry. They will decide how we should respond if we make these decisions, and what decisions should be made jointly,

in particular, with the Central Bank.

It is clear to us that, as the situation will continue to deteriorate (as you said today, Mr President) Russia cannot afford to lose pace. Today we must exacerbate this situation and meet it head on, because this is the only way to catalyse import substitution and fulfil the national development goals you set before us.

We support these efforts and will do all we can to ensure the economic development and wellbeing of our people.

Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: So, you support the appeal by the State Duma?

Mikhail Mishustin: I have now heard what Mr Patrushev had to say. I think it is necessary to get our position across, to catalyse it, if you will, and if there is no progress, to recognise the LPR and the DPR.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

Mr Naryshkin.

Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service [Sergei](#)

[Naryshkin](#): Mr President,

We have seen for a long time, and I periodically inform you about this, that the current leaders of Ukraine are not going to honour the Minsk agreements.

The President of Ukraine says in his circle that he can say anything he wants about the Minsk agreements for the record. He can say he adheres to the Minsk agreements whereas in reality he is not going to fulfil them. The same is typical of his conversations with Western leaders. If there is no press around, he says bluntly that “we simply cannot abide by the Minsk agreements.”

Power is more precious to the current Ukrainian authorities than peace, the restoration of peace and the end of this conflict between the Kiev regime and Donbass.

With regard to the developments in Ukraine, I can say that this notorious thesis about the Russian leadership's plans to "invade" Ukraine was born within the walls of the US State Department and has been whipped up to such proportions that it is already reminiscent of war propaganda. This was done in order to try to provoke the Kiev regime into another attempt to resolve the problem of Donbass by military means.

Of course, we simply have no right to let this happen. As mentioned earlier, there are about four million people who live there and who want to speak Russian and to think in Russian; they want to celebrate their history and the heroes who defended this land for many, many years.

Thinking back to what Russia did seven or eight years ago, when it simply responded to the desire of the people of Crimea and Sevastopol to live as part of Russia – and this decisive opinion was expressed by the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol during the most democratic procedure, which is the nationwide referendum – I believe that in the current situation we are simply obligated to act in this way.

I would agree with Mr Patrushev's proposal that our, so to speak, Western partners can be given a last chance in order for them to force Kiev to make peace and comply with the Minsk Agreements as soon as possible. Otherwise, we must take the decision that is being discussed today.

Vladimir Putin: What does "otherwise" mean? Do you propose starting a negotiating process or recognising the sovereignty of the republics? Speak plainly.

Sergei Naryshkin: I will support the proposal to recognise...

Vladimir Putin: Will support or support? Speak plainly, Mr Naryshkin.

Sergei Naryshkin: I support the proposal...

Vladimir Putin: Just say yes or no.

Sergei Naryshkin: That is what I am saying: I support the proposal to have the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics become part of the Russian Federation.

Vladimir Putin: We are not talking about this, we are not discussing this. We are talking about recognising their independence or not.

Sergei Naryshkin: Yes. I support the proposal to recognise their independence.

Vladimir Putin: Good. Please take your seat. Thank you.

Mr Kolokoltsev.

Interior Minister [Vladimir Kolokoltsev](#): Mr President, colleagues,

Looking back in history, one can always find analogies to certain processes that we are currently observing.

The point of view of the current and former Kiev authorities is that they were forced to sign the Minsk agreements in a difficult situation back then, because they were driven into a corner, and that the Minsk agreements are akin to an act of capitulation. Well, then, "colleagues," let us draw a historical parallel and remember May 1945. Supposedly, Germany signed the Act of Surrender and failed to comply with it for seven years citing a variety of circumstances such as getting into pockets in the streets of Berlin and the like. This is an analogy.

So, what can we talk about today when our foreign partners invite us to play a fair game at the negotiating table? We can play a fair game only when we have honest and trustworthy partners at the table. However, when you have partners with marked cards who are trying their best to justify official Kiev's hypocritical and deceitful position, what is there to discuss then? Who is inviting us to start this dialogue? We are encouraged to do so by our foreign partners who, having presented a vial with white powder, proceeded to bomb Iraq, change the legitimate government, and drown the people in blood. Having done that, they are inviting us to a dialogue.

There is no doubt that these republics and their legal standing must be recognised. But I have an amendment to make. They should be recognised within the administrative boundaries which these republics and the peoples of these republics had prior to their occupation by the armed forces of Ukraine, namely, from Mariupol to those historical borders.

Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you very much.

Regarding the negotiating process, Mr Kozak reported it is at a dead end. We have been negotiating for eight years now. This is what we are talking about.

All plenipotentiary envoys are present here. I would like to ask one of you, say, Mr Shchegolev, to speak out. Of course, I expect you to express your own position, but we will assume that our other colleagues adhere to approximately the same viewpoint. Should any envoy feel the need to add something and express their point of view, they are welcome to do so.

Please, go ahead.

Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy to the Central Federal

District [Igor Shchegolev](#): Mr President, members of the Security Council,

We all remember 2014 and the pain our people felt with regard to ongoing developments in Crimea and what began to unfold in Donbass and Lugansk. We remember the public demanding the recognition of these two republics back then. We are aware of the courage and patience the political leadership of the country needed in order to give the new Ukrainian authorities a chance to use their own resources to heal this wound on the body of Ukraine and its people, who are, in fact, one people with us.

Over this period, the second President is nearing the end of his first term in office, and the first President has already been charged with high treason for signing the Minsk agreements. We hear the Ukrainian Nazis describe what will happen to the people of these republics after the Ukrainian government returns there. They directly threaten to destroy them and subject them to vetting and physical execution.

Today, a force is concentrated on the borders of Ukraine, which is comparable in its offensive firepower to the Guderian-led grouping, which went from Bryansk to Donbass in August 1941. At the same time, Russia is accused of being overly aggressive, perhaps because it is too aggressive in protecting the lives of our brothers.

I believe we should recognise Lugansk and Donbass.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

I would like to ask all those present here today, are there any other points of view or special opinions on this matter? None? I know the position of the Foreign Ministry, the Defence Ministry,

and the Federal Security Service. Nevertheless, I would like to hear what you have to say.

Mr Lavrov, you have the floor.

Sergey Lavrov: Mr President, we have already heard all the arguments in favour of this decision. Wherever you look, it is the West that is doing all this, and the Ukrainian leadership takes pleasure in carrying it all out despite all the agreements and all the precedents in settling internal conflicts.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine is the only conflict where one side is refusing to talk to the other, and the West fully supports this. Take Cyprus, the “turkish republic of northern Cyprus.” The negotiating process there is in progress, with the UN playing a mediating role. Take Mali, where the French are now facing some challenges. The government is talking to the rebels there. The same applies to Ethiopia. The European Union oversees dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. Everyone is seeking to assist these processes.

There is this aspect here expressed in the term “genocide,” which you, Mr President, have mentioned during your press conference with Olaf Scholz. The history of the creation of Kosovo, an all but independent entity established without any referendum, is about genocide. The fact that they are now trying to prop up an overtly neo-Nazi, Banderite regime in Kiev is also a manifestation of genocide. In both cases, this is an attack against Slavs, against Orthodox Christians, and in Ukraine’s case, against everything Russian. This runs counter to the Ukrainian constitution, as we all know very well. However, this has not prevented the Kiev regime from adopting one law after another to enforce ever tighter requirements for banning the Russian language not only in schools and universities, but

in everyday life.

I do hope that in this way, we will send a strong signal to the Russian world. For eight years now, we could not stay indifferent to the humiliating treatment our compatriots, our citizens have been facing. For this reason, I do not see any other alternative.

As for the proposals to give the West two or three days more to come to its senses, this is a matter of opinion, but there is no doubt that the West will not change its position. Everyone understands this.

Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

Mr Shoigu.

Sergei Shoigu: Mr President,

It is 2022, eight years since people, young and old, started learning how to live in basements. Not a single one of these clauses has been implemented during this period. Only one was implemented, when the forces were disengaged and the Ukrainian units were withdrawn. But the Ukrainians did this in the hope that one day they would be strong again and solve the problem by force.

The way the picture develops, or the next page in this book is massive weapons deliveries to Ukraine. These deliveries are continuing with obscure aims and obscure motives. As it is, they have enough weapons for a lot of conflicts, large and small, which they stage with enviable persistence in the Lugansk and Donetsk republics.

But every day, four, five, and even occasionally eight flights arrived with weapons, modern weapons. And when they say

that these are for defence, I can hardly imagine that Javelins are defensive weapons. In the meantime, there are more Javelins there than in some NATO countries. This is evidence that no one is going to comply with the Minsk accords and that everyone is getting ready to solve the problem by force.

The situation being what it is, I think they have left us with no other choice. Therefore, I say expressly “yes”: yes, we should recognise them.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

Alexander Bortnikov: Mr President, the Lugansk People’s Republic and the Donetsk People’s Republic, the people in these republics have for several years looked to the Russian Federation and asked it to protect them in the hope of living, working and bringing up children, in the hope of living in peace. I am absolutely certain that we should help them to implement their right and defend them.

I am confident that a decision to recognise these republics will facilitate this. We will help realise this hope, definitely.

Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Mr Zolotov.

Director of the Federal Service of the National Guard Troops of the Russian Federation and Commander-in-Chief of the National Guard Troops of the Russian Federation

[Viktor Zolotov](#): Mr President, colleagues, the German Chancellor has said that talk about genocide in Donbass is laughable. You know, I would like to hear what he would say if German citizens were living in that territory and if they were subjected to artillery fire every day. What would he say and would he chuckle about this?

Mr Macron said (you have just spoken with him and told us what he said) that the Ukrainian authorities were ready to implement the Minsk accords. Our colleagues are absolutely right in saying that this is not the case. Moreover, Zelensky states that they are ready to create nuclear arsenals. So, what will we come to?

At the same time, we do not border on Ukraine, we have no border with Ukraine. This is the Americans' border, because they are the masters in that country, while the Ukrainians are their vassals. And the fact that they are rushing weapons to Ukraine and are trying to create nuclear arsenals will backfire on us in the future.

Recognising these republics is certainly a must. I would like to say that we should go ever further to defend our country.

That is all I have to say. Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Fine. Thank you.

Colleagues, I have heard your opinions. The decision will be made later today.

I would like to thank you for this meeting, for this conference.