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Joint news conference with President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko

41-52 minutes





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With President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko at a news conference following Russian-Belarusian talks. Photo: RIA Novosti

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Mr Lukashenko, friends,

I consider it important and symbolic that the talks with the President of Belarus today, on Cosmonautics Day, took place here, at Vostochny Cosmodrome.

Our nations are proud that the first manned flight to space, by Yury Gagarin, 61 years ago ushered in a new era of space exploration.

President Lukashenko and I visited the Cosmodrome's key facilities on this memorable day – the command centre and the launching pad for the Angara launch vehicles. We talked to Cosmodrome employees and met with the pilot-cosmonauts who received Russia's high state decorations just recently, a few hours ago.

Everything that we saw during our visit to Vostochny Cosmodrome, all the successes in space exploration over the past few years show that our country maintains its leadership in cosmonautics. It is obviously a leader in this area. Russia's space industry is dynamically developing with reliance on the powerful scientific and technical potential created over the past decades.

Importantly, together with our Belarusian friends, we have managed to preserve and enhance our close cooperation in space research. Our countries are carrying out joint programmes and we

will continue doing all we can to promote cooperation in this vital area.

I would like to note that on April 1, on the eve of the Day of Unity between the peoples of Russia and Belarus, Mr Lukashenko, acting as the Chairman of the Union State Supreme State Council awarded prizes in science and technology to teams of Russian and Belarusian scientists for joint space developments.

We agreed to continue encouraging this cooperation, in particular, to intensify the work on developing a space system for the remote sensing of the Earth. These are devices for electro-optical high-detail video surveillance, which will become a key element in the EAEU-developed integrated system for producing space and geo-information products.

One more promising move is to involve Belarusian specialists in building space infrastructure on Russian territory, including this Cosmodrome. A law is about to be adopted to allow citizens and companies from Belarus to work on the territory of the Tsiolkovsky closed administrative-territorial formation of the Amur Region, where we are now.

We also discussed an orbital mission with a Belarusian cosmonaut. This could take place as early as next year.

Naturally, during the talks we reviewed in detail many other current bilateral issues. As closest allies, we are building relations on the immutable principles of mutual respect and support and traditions of friendship and neighbourliness which are upheld by our common history, spiritual and cultural values and close ties of kinship.

Belarus is our leading trade and economic partner in the CIS

and ranks fourth for us globally. In 2021, our trade grew by more than one third – as we have just discussed – reaching US\$40 billion. I am convinced that in the current situation, when the Western countries have unleashed a complete sanctions war against Russia and Belarus, it is important to deepen our integration within the Union State, and we agree with Mr President on this issue.

We will continue to oppose any attempt to impede the development of our countries or to isolate them artificially from the global economy. I believe this is pointless; Russia and Belarus have always been closely linked economically. As I said, we are tied in many ways, including industrial cooperation, and such attempts will never succeed against us. I am confident that we will become even stronger because we will develop our own competences and, importantly, we will not isolate ourselves.

Our governments and relevant departments have organised work on import substitution and the uninterrupted functioning of financial and commodity markets. The Union State has the following priorities: to unify and harmonise trade regulations, remove administrative and technical barriers, and create equal opportunities for Russian and Belarusian citizens and companies. These are the goals of the 28 sectoral programmes endorsed by the Supreme State Council on November 4, 2021.

The President of Belarus noted today that our countries have already carried out over 30 percent of what we had planned by the end of 2023.

Thus, we determined approaches to the formation of a uniform monetary policy, currency regulations and integration of national payment systems with banking. We signed a contract

on harmonising our customs legislation. We are working to launch an interstate centre on financial risk management. We are creating an integrated system for administering indirect taxes. We met halfway our Belarusian friends and granted them comfortable terms for servicing Russian loans. We hope this will help strengthen the entire financial sector of the Union State.

In energy, we finalised a draft international contract to create an integrated electricity market. Russia keeps its lowest prices on oil and gas for domestic consumption in Belarus. Payments for them have been switched to Russian rubles. This makes it possible to minimise the negative influence of the external environment on the position of Belarusian citizens and industrial companies.

The joint construction of a Belarusian nuclear power plant is nearing completion. Its second power unit will be put into operation by the end of this year.

In transport, we launched an integrated product tracking system. We are gradually integrating databases of government monitoring bodies in transport supervision. We intend to accelerate the development of new transport routes in the south and the east to guarantee delivery of our products abroad.

Of course, we discussed issues related to creating a common defence space and ensuring the security of the Union State. We analysed measures to defend our western borders, the course of military-technical cooperation and specified the plans for joint exercises. Mr Lukashenko was informed in detail about the progress of the special military operation in Donbass and Ukraine and the progress of talks.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to express my gratitude to our Belarusian colleagues for the efficient organisation of several negotiating rounds on their territory. A direct dialogue with the Ukrainian side was possible largely due to President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko's personal efforts. We believe the Belarusian platform is quite suitable for further meetings.

Overall, Mr Lukashenko and I have covered almost all areas of our interaction today.

The President of Belarus has yet to visit Vladivostok.

The President plans to see the cultural and educational centre that is being built with the participation of Belarusian specialists, as well as to become more familiar with the achievements of the Far Eastern Federal District in the socioeconomic and other spheres.

Mr President, I am sure this part of your visit will be productive and will help expand and strengthen our interaction.

Thank you for your attention.

President of Belarus [Alexander Lukashenko](#): Mr Putin, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the President of Russia for the warm welcome on this land. This trip to this Far Eastern land is extremely important to us. This is a stunning and extraordinary land.

Frankly, I have long wanted to come here. For me, it was a kind of a romantic adventure. The fact that we had a chance to see the implementation of a project such as Vostochny Cosmodrome on Cosmonautics Day made the general impression received by our entire delegation even stronger. This is a world-class

project, as they often refer to it. No, it is above world level. No one else in the world has ever carried out such a project.

Space exploration is our shared goal. During Soviet times, Belarusians made a significant contribution to the development of cosmonautics.

In our times, with the help of fraternal Russia, we have managed not only to revive the old competencies, but also to develop many new ones. As a result, Belarus has joined the ranks of space powers. In fact, we have created a new branch of the economy, space economics, and we are proud of these successes. Most importantly, we see prospects for the future which include developing a system for remote sensing of the Earth – a decision concerning this programme was made today, satellite communications and many other exciting areas of cooperation in this sphere.

The time has probably come to open the door to space for new Belarusian cosmonauts. I am grateful to the President for supporting this initiative and, moreover, for making a decision, in conjunction with the head of Roscosmos, to finance the training and the launching of our cosmonaut into space.

Of course, as Mr President said, we also had an in-depth discussion on other current issues on the bilateral agenda, on political, diplomatic, economic and, of course, military and defence matters.

There have never been such dangerous and complicated periods in the modern history of our relations with the West. I pointed this out when we discussed the issue that everyone is talking about today; I pointed this out to Mr President, and I said this

for a reason, that if Russia had taken even a bit longer to start its military operation, a blow they believed to be crushing would have been delivered at the adjacent regions. We can clearly see today that this was more than possible.

Therefore, those who say that it was the wrong move or that it was made in the wrong place and at the wrong time should weigh it against the potential consequences of what would have happened had this move been made a month or even two weeks later. There is nothing more to add.

It is like the story in Bucha; we discussed that policy. There is a lot of commotion, but they just needed to adopt a new package of sanctions, as we know very well. We discussed their special operation today, the psychological operation carried out by the British. If you want to know the addresses, the secret meeting places, the licence plate numbers, the brands of vehicles they used in Bucha, and how they did it, the FSB of Russia can provide this information. If not, we can help. We exposed that ugly, disgusting position of the West together with our Russian friends, in full and from the beginning to the end.

Back then, we decided that the cold war was over, that the page had been turned and we would live in a new, civilised and fair world based on mutual understanding and the rule of international law. This is what we thought, but the West thought differently. They did not destroy us back then, and so they have decided to do it now. We are in an extremely dangerous situation; it is a showdown, and it did not appear out of thin air. Washington and Brussels have been deliberately moving towards this for years. It is perfectly clear now that, regrettably, the clash could not be avoided. Moreover, as I said before, it was only a matter

of time and place. I would like to stress again that if we had waited a little longer, the consequences would have been extremely severe.

The governments of Belarus and Russia have prepared comprehensive packages of measures to overcome, among other things, the sanctions pressure, to support the economies, to expand cooperation and, most importantly, import substitution, to reconfigure supply chains and to switch to a new mechanism for foreign trade cooperation.

As we are responding to current challenges today, we must already be looking to tomorrow, which is what is happening here, and putting in place a ground-breaking economic development strategy for building the Union State for the long term.

They say the world will never be the same, which is true. For those who would very much like to return, as they say, to their comfort zone, we can say it straight: forget about it. The modern world is all about fierce struggle and civilisational clashes. Incidentally, the West has never had any illusions in this regard. By the way, there was once a major figure in Europe who, in the 1930s and 1940s, also tried to establish a new order. We are all well aware of how it all ended.

So, I think it is time for Washington to return to the recent past when our fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers stood up to the enemy and eventually won. We will also win, as has happened many times in our common thousand-year history.

Thank you.

Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov: Thank you.

We will ask the presidents to take four questions, two questions each from Belarusian and Russian journalists.

As is customary, we will start with our guests.

Question: Good afternoon!

President Putin, to follow up on your remarks, this question is for you.

You said it is symbolic that your meeting with President Lukashenko is taking place right here, at Vostochny Cosmodrome. Mr Lukashenko added that this project exceeds global standards.

I will start my question with a comment. We found out that President Lukashenko is the only head of a foreign state to ever visit this place. We believe that an invitation to such a facility is quite symbolic for Belarus and Russia alike. But there is a stereotype we often hear, especially in Russia, pardon me for repeating it, that we are like “little brothers.”

How appropriate is that in light of recent developments over the past several years? I do not know the answer, so I want to ask you personally. Tell me, please, how dear has Belarus become to you in light of recent years and events?

Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: I would emphasise the second word: not “little” but “brothers.” We have always treated Belarus this way. And nothing has changed in the past few months. We had no doubt that if any country backed us, it was Belarusians, it was Belarus.

It has always been like this throughout our centuries-long common history. We do not even particularly distinguish where Belarus ends and where Russia begins, where Russia is and Belarus is.

Also, however strange it may sound today, I have always said that we are a triune nation: Ukraine, Belarus and Russia.

There is no doubt at all that is happening in Ukraine is a tragedy. But the President rightly said that we were left without a choice. There was simply no choice. There was only a question of time – when it will start. This is all.

As for Belarus, I have already expressed my position: Mr Lukashenko's presence here today is no accident. This shows once again a) the special character of our relations, and b) the pragmatism, including that of the President of Belarus. He repeatedly expressed willingness to take part in building such large high-tech facilities as a cosmodrome.

But we had a law that banned foreign companies and individuals from participation in closed territorial formations. But we have changed this law. As you know, we are changing it now. The Duma has already passed it, now it will go to the Federation Council and I will certainly sign it.

I would like to note one more aspect. Russia is interested in attracting specialists from Belarus, including rank-and-file builders, as well as specialists, engineers and researchers because, as I have already said, our programme of joint activities in space has several components. It is not limited to the participation of Belarusian builders in the work here, on this complex, but also implies the development of spacecraft and work on manned flights, which we will continue to move forward with. Belarus has preserved the necessary skills and competencies. We are now working on a craft, a satellite that we will jointly develop in research centres and design bureaux, but that will be

assembled in Belarus. It is natural for us to continue advancing cooperation that dates back to Soviet times. We will do this on a new basis, of course.

I would like to emphasise it again – the fact that we are doing this with Belarus, and even in closed territorial formations, is symbolic and demonstrates once again how close we are.

Alexander Lukashenko: Excuse me, Mr President. Excuse me, Dmitry.

Our journalist asked his question with the implication that we are “little brothers” and we are somewhat different. This has never been the case! The President of Russia never called Belarusians or me a little brother. You know, this is my terminology. I keep saying, sometimes half-jokingly, sometimes as a joke, and sometimes in earnest, “So what? Little brothers!” If someone said that to us, and President Putin initially felt ill at ease when I said that, I would say to him, “Why should you worry? A little brother means that the big brother can criticise him any time, but he will also help by all means.” Therefore, there was a lot of sense in that. It does not mean that if we are little brothers, we are clumsy. No way!

During our face-to-face conversation today when we were one-on-one, the President listed all the competences the “little brother” has, and he generally mentioned it now. It is a long list. Thanks to Russia, we are a space power today. But we would not be so technologically advanced if we had not taken the decision back then to develop space technologies.

During the first meeting with workshop workers, the President said that space is an engine that drives entire sectors of the economy,

high-tech sectors. We have had a good school since Soviet times; Russia did not leave us but helped us. We launched a couple of satellites which are still operating and have long paid for themselves.

Next, the nuclear power plant. It means top-notch technologies. Together with our “big brother” we have created these high technologies in Belarus by building a nuclear power plant. And the Russians, “big brothers,” taught us to build such plants. The key for us is – give us a reactor, and we will build everything else ourselves.

Next, BNBC [Belarussian National Biotechnological Corporation]. You see, the most advanced biotechnology processes, four plants in the world. We have set up this corporation in Belarus.

Defence. It is crucial. The President spoke modestly about it, however, at our talks we focused on the defence of Belarus and Russia. You know that the “little” and “big” brothers set up a joint formation, a joint army in the west. We are being taken to task no less than Russia, you know, “aggressors, aggressors” and the like, as if they did not know that we have a joint army. And once there is a joint army, it is not one part that fights while another stays at home and so on.

I did not conceal that. On the second day of Russia’s operation in Ukraine I openly talked about our role in that operation. Do you remember I said that we will never let anyone shoot a Russian in the back, and this was the essence of our operation, our participation in that operation.

So, we see what is going on, we see the Americans pushing not only Ukraine but also our western neighbour Poland

and the Baltics into a standoff with Belarus. So, in this situation the “big brother” will help the “little brother” if needed. That is what it means, and not that the big brother is everything and the little one is unable to do anything.

The fourth area we created and take pride in is missile engineering. The President promised me back at our previous meeting – you know that we are making a more up-to-date missile within the bounds of international law – so he promised me to help in this matter so that we do not waste years designing controls for that missile.

I can name many skills the “little brother” has. One of them is construction. I told the President of Russia once – let us help in this case. Dmitry Rogozin came – he is present here, we discussed with him what we could do here. We can build both industrial facilities and social infrastructure. And the fact that the President has invited a president of another country – even if it is the “little brother” – to a top secret facility, and you came here with me, testifies to the high degree of trust on the part of the “big brother.”

And so I am not especially worried about that. Big, little – we have found a common language. I forgot about all the sanctions while I was here.

We will keep working in all the areas and no sanctions will bend us or keep us from our path. Try not to worry, take it from me. At least you have a brother, even if “little”.

Dmitry Peskov: Over to Russian journalists. *Rossiya Segodnya*, please.

Question: Good afternoon.

My question concerns the economy. How are the unprecedented sanctions finally affecting the economic situation? What macroeconomic and microeconomic effects do you see and how is the banking sector coping? Perhaps some industries still require additional support? Is there a risk that some sectors may soon enter a challenging phase due to the sanctions? Also, how might these developments impact the economic aspects of the union integration?

Vladimir Putin: We have already covered this issue multiple times. I can only reiterate what was said before. The blitzkrieg that our ill-wishers hoped to achieve was unsuccessful, of course. It is obvious. Our financial system and industrial sector are operating as normal.

Of course, there are issues – otherwise the Central Bank would not have raised the key rate to 20 percent. But, as you know, the Central Bank has already decided to lower the key rate and, in general, this measure is commensurate with the current macroeconomic parameters. As it turns out, the Russian economy and its financial system are standing quite firmly on their feet.

I believe that this trend towards maintaining the macroeconomic indicators and the smooth and paced competent operation of the economic sector will bring results in the days to come.

Of course, we do see and understand the risks related to logistics and payments. It is obvious.

It is also obvious that the Russian economy is stable and effective. I do not want to repeat myself. You can see for yourselves that the dollar exchange rate has returned to the level it was at before the operation, and so on. However, risks may increase

in the medium to long term.

Russia's opponents plan to intensify their efforts. On the other hand, it appears to me that common sense must also prioritise certain things. For example, we are facing obstacles with respect to logistics, port calls, vessel and aircraft insurance and other matters. We have just discussed this using the example of the mineral fertiliser industry.

If our Western partners change nothing here, the volume of Russian and Belarusian mineral fertilisers will shrink in the world market. But our industry will find where to send all this, I assure you. Many countries that we have not classified as unfriendly are eager to get Russian and Belarusian fertilisers. There is no productive agriculture without them. And if agriculture is unable to deliver productively, there will not be enough food in the world, in the world market.

Food prices have already been on the rise, even before the events we are talking about. And the increase is considerable. Prices of certain types of fertiliser are currently three times higher than before the crisis, and they continue to rise.

Among other things, all of this is linked to Western countries' mistakes in the energy and gas sphere, because natural gas is the primary component in the production of many fertilisers. All of this constitutes chains that are hard to break today. We were not the ones to create these problems. But the situation will get even worse for our partners, among others, if on top of everything else they aggravate the financial, insurance and transport situation, including maritime freight carriage. After all, the dearth of food or exorbitant world prices will lead to famine in entire regions

of the world, and this is inevitable. The next step is new waves of migration, including those heading to European countries.

I think commonsense should prevail, after all is said and done. And this is my great hope. Otherwise, those who initiated these processes stand to lose the most.

We are aware that we have to allocate additional resources to support certain sectors. We are also aware that the most correct decision in the emerging situation is to debureaucratise the economy and enable the growth of new production outlets based on newly created logistical chains.

In this connection, I can say that I have much hope for the rise of small and medium-sized businesses, the initiative from below, and the emergence of new leaders in Russia. The economy will adjust to the new situation without fail. If you cannot charter one ship, you can charter another. If you cannot send something to one country, you can send it to a third country. If you cannot buy something here, you can buy it in a fourth country. This is inevitable. The world today is much more complex than it was during the Cold War, when there were just two blocs and everything was covered by the CoCom lists. The world is more complex today and, in this world, a single country will be unable to maintain total domination.

What do we see now? We see the collapse of the unipolar world system that developed after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. This is the main point. The main thing is not the tragic events in Donbass and Ukraine; they are not the main thing. A lot is said about the United States being “ready to fight against Russia to the last Ukrainian.” This is being said there, and it is being said

here, and it is true. It is the essence of the current events.

The economy is certainly part of these events. Some countries are trying to preserve their domination, including in the economy, but they will not succeed. Just take a look at the trends in global economic development over the past decade, economic growth in terms of the purchasing power parity, look at the leaders and the pace of development, and everything will become clear. Therefore, those who are adopting unjustified restrictions should come to their senses in good time and make a calm, correct, balanced and safe decision.

Alexander Lukashenko: I wholeheartedly support the opinion of the President of Russia that the era of the unipolar world is over. Simply put, a unipolar world is nonviable. The President has provided a more complex, philosophical explanation. Any system is more stable if based on more than one support. The more supports there are, the more stable the system.

Would it be a bad thing if the global system and the planet rested on four supports: the United States, the European Union as a second support, Russia, China and, possibly, India? Would it be less stable than the current system that is based on a single destructive, self-destructive support – the United States? I believe that sums it up.

As for the sanctions, I wholeheartedly agree that there is nothing good about them. They create additional problems and take up valuable time. Yes, we will create a new system, find new logistics routes and many other things, but this takes time, and we could have used this time to move forward, to accelerate our progress, instead of wasting our time trying to find alternative routes

and to figure things out.

Yes, indeed, the world is different today, and it will be impossible to crush anyone, including such a huge country as Russia, which is absolutely self-sufficient but once came to believe in globalism and opened up its markets to its partners. Well, they behaved accordingly. We are telling them, “All right, goodbye, we will get along on our own.”

And we can do everything. Today, we devoted a lot of attention to co-production matters. We talked a lot about our common market. I told the President that, as they say, Belarus is not as huge as Russia, it is smaller, but good things come in small packages.

This is not the most important matter. As the President often says, competencies come first. Look, we have arrived here. It turns out that a gigantic Russia is interested in developing spacecraft together with us. We have these competencies, and Russia will be using them.

Take construction, the simplest aspect. In Soviet times, Belarus served as a school for construction workers. The best builders lived in Belarus. And where have they gone? Well, they are still there. If we obtain a contract here today at the suggestion of President Putin, there is nothing wrong with that.

Four or five months ago, the President and I discussed the issue of more advanced high-tech production facilities, including the creation and manufacture of semiconductors. We found many enterprises in Russia and Belarus, and we are now consolidating them, including *Integral* and others. The President promised financial support, and we will also do our best.

As I often say, we can provide Dmitry Rogozin with a different and slightly larger printed circuit board and control system. However, it will operate smoothly, the spacecraft will lift off and return. Spacecraft have returned in the past, and this will also be the case now. In due time, we will catch up with them and overtake them, no matter what, because we are determined to do so and because we are not hampering anyone's work.

We are therefore steering towards co-production and a common market. Our survey shows that Belarus manufactures several thousand items. The President of Russia asked us to provide Russia with these items, in order to assess local demand for them. We did not refuse to provide even one item, and we delivered foodstuffs and petroleum derivatives, although Russia is an oil power, etc. This list included refrigerators, television sets, washing machines, detergents, and all the other products that we manufacture. Thank God, all this is now in high demand in Russia.

As for funding, lending and other opportunities, Russia is a great help to us in these circumstances. You know that everything that we produce we can sell here, which means we are happy with payments in Russian rubles. We have finally started trading in rubles, including oil, gas and other commodities. We are fine with that.

We have two major products. The President of Russia mentioned fertilisers. We have potassium, phosphorus and nitrogen fertilisers. We have all of them. Trust me, it is only a matter of time. When the world begins to starve, they will realise that without fertilisers, there is no harvest. Trust me, I know something about this.

The Americans swaggered for a while but eventually, they too had

to admit that Russian fertilisers must be allowed into the markets immediately. They opened a window – and yet, shipments are still blocked in ports. They will come to their senses tomorrow – or farmers will force them to. The public will soon take the matter into their own hands.

The second major commodity is petroleum products. We also discussed this issue today and agreed that we will find a solution. In fact, we did. The governments of Belarus and Russia will act on the decisions of the two presidents.

Vladimir Putin: I would like to add a couple of words here.

Of course, we are interested in cooperating with hi-tech economies – everybody understands this obvious intention. But here is the problem: in the course of this cooperation, we became hooked on somebody else's technology and hi-tech products. We stopped improving our own competencies and our own engineering schools in certain industries.

It turns out that within the system that was established and that continues to exist in the world economy, it is possible to take action and steps beyond publicly declared rules. The best example, which I have already mentioned many times, is our Irkut MC-21 aircraft. As soon as we moved forward with this hi-tech product – notably, without anybody's help – they immediately cut us off from composite materials, for no reason. Why? To make sure that our production process was frozen and the aircraft did not enter the market before Boeing. So much for rules.

Yes, clearly challenges are inevitable. But there is a gaping window of opportunity. We will have to develop our own competencies and our own science. We will use this new base

to move forward – also taking into account other countries' achievements. Nobody can close all the doors and all the windows.

Question: Good evening.

Mr Lukashenko, much was said about Belarusian construction workers, our cosmonaut, and a new satellite today.

Leaving the cosmic sphere for more mundane topics, what issues in Belarusian-Russian relations still need special attention from the presidents?

Alexander Lukashenko: You know, all areas of our activities that have been discussed for a long time without much to show for it are now the focus of our attention and analysis. There is not a single issue that could be raised by either president, or a respective government, that would go without attention.

Indeed, not a single issue. Today, we discussed oil and gas, including pricing. Moreover, the President told me that Russia would support our oil refineries in the same way they are supported in the Russian Federation. The governments are working on this.

I was surprised to find out that the President is absolutely abreast of the situation in our common market and the groups of goods that we are currently supplying to Russia, and that Russia is selling in the common market, including in Belarus, and specific types of goods, such as machine-building etc., right down to agriculture with specific knowledge about what and where to sow...

So, we discussed these issues including the military, and it

appears that whatever issue I raised (I raised more issues than he did) I received support, not just a positive reaction, but support. So, I cannot say we have any issues. There will always be challenges, but they can all be resolved, and we are working to overcome them.

Dmitry Peskov: We will take the last question today from *Kommersant*, please go ahead.

Question: Good afternoon.

I have a question for the President of Russia. This is not a short question, but the situation is multipronged, so the question will be multipronged as well.

Mr President, you said you updated the President of Belarus on the progress of the special operation. Could you please tell us what you think about the special operation as of today?

In this regard, one more question. What do you think about the course of the talks between the Russian and Ukrainian delegations? Also, in connection with this, because everything is connected with it, I have a question about the developments in Bucha and Kramatorsk. After all, clearly, most of the world has rejected the logic of Russia's explanations for what happened there. Please, what is your logic there?

Yesterday, the Chancellor of Austria said you lived in the logic of military operations, the logic of war. Hence, there is no place for talks. Please tell us about your real logic.

Thank you.

I have a short question for the President of Belarus. The President of Russia has instructed Dmitry Rogozin to send a Belarusian

cosmonaut into space. Would you like to be the one?

Thank you.

Alexander Lukashenko: Yes, I would. I used to think “big brother” could send me there and leave me there, but today I do not think that, so I would like to go into space. But I have a candidate in mind, and I will think about it.

Vladimir Putin: The special military operation is proceeding as planned. Of course, I am closely monitoring the discussion in our society and abroad. We must not keep anything from the public or keep anything secret; we must provide objective information about this combat operation.

First of all, I would like to express gratitude to begin my response by expressing my gratitude to the Russian soldiers and officers, the Russian service personnel for their heroic service to the Fatherland. This is exactly how they are acting. By fulfilling complicated and dangerous objectives in Donbass and Ukraine, our military personnel are protecting the interests of Russia and defending Russia.

It is with good reason that the President of Belarus has said, and I said this even before the operation, that confrontation with the forces that have been nurtured by far-right nationalists and neo-Nazis in Ukraine was inevitable, and that it was only a matter of time. They were preparing and biding their time, and we, as I said back then, will not allow them to do this. This is the logic behind our actions.

What is taking place in Ukraine, considering that Ukrainians are our fraternal people, something I want to stress even in these tragic circumstances, first of all, this Ukrainian nationalism

originated back in the 19th century. We know that it was encouraged before World War I primarily by the Austrian General Staff. What for? The answer is the notorious logic: divide and conquer. Divide the Russian people and destroy them piecemeal.

The same method was used during World War II. We know that the Polish pogroms and Jewish pogroms were not perpetrated by Germans but by the same Waffen SS Galicia, Banderites and the other pro-Nazi bastards. They exterminated peaceful civilians: Russians, Jews and Poles.

This is a common fact. And today we can see in Ukrainian newsreels people with SS Galicia sleeve patches in the combat zone in Donbass. This means that we acted correctly and at the right time when we started this operation, or there would have been many more such people there.

As for the course of the operation as such, I always hear questions on whether it could be done quicker. It could; it depends on the intensity of the military operations but, unfortunately, this could entail more losses in one way or another. Our job is to reach all our goals while minimizing these losses. And we will be acting smoothly and calmly, according to the initial plan of the General Headquarters. I have spoken about this many times. There is no need to repeat all this at the news conference.

Actions in certain areas of Ukraine are only aimed at containing the enemy, strikes to destroy the military infrastructure and create conditions for more active operations on the territory of Donbass. Meanwhile, the goal of our entire operation, I will repeat what I said in the early hours of February 24, is to help the people living

in Donbass who feel inseparably linked to Russia and who have been subjected to genocide for eight years. The only question is how...

Alexander Lukashenko: Today, this is the occupation by Ukraine, as you said.

Vladimir Putin: Yes, occupation by Ukraine as well. This is exactly what it is after their independence was recognised. This is how matters stand. The operation is going according to plan.

Now regarding our logic, it is simple. After all, during preparations for World War I and during World War II, a certain segment of the Ukrainian people and Ukrainian society especially those linked with Western ideology, was against Russia. These attempts are also being made today, in our time.

As for the people in military uniform with SS Division Galicia stripes – they are simply scum. But there are others who sympathise with them. They consider themselves nationalists rather than Nazis. However, they must also realise that the main goal of the West is not to help Ukraine. Ukraine is just a means to reaching goals that have nothing to do with the interests of the Ukrainian people. This is what the problem is, and what determines the logic of our actions in Donbass and in Ukraine as a whole.

As for Bucha... Now, listen, I often talked to my colleagues from the Western countries, up until now, and when they say “Bucha” to me, I ask them whether they have ever been to Raqqa? Did they see this Syrian city that was razed to the ground by US aviation?

Indeed, the dead bodies have been lying in the ruins for months

on end decomposing. Nobody cared about them before that, and no one even noticed, just as no one remembers hundreds of dead civilians in Afghanistan, when a hundred or more civilians were killed at a wedding in one air strike. Silence. This silence was not there when they staged provocations in Syria and manufactured the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Assad government. Then it turned out that it was a fake, just like the fake in Bucha.

Mr President gave me some documents, which he mentioned in passing today, which were forwarded to the Russian Federal Security Service, about who did this and how – our colleagues have this information intercepted – what transport they used to get to that town and create the scene for staging this provocation and fake.

With regard to the negotiations, look, we reached certain agreements in Istanbul, under which security guarantees for Ukraine – and the Ukrainian side is striving to obtain very strict security guarantees for itself – will not apply to Crimea, Sevastopol and Donbass.

Then, as you know, we made certain efforts to create a proper environment for continuing the negotiating process. In return, we saw the provocation in Bucha and, most importantly, the Ukrainian side walked away from the Istanbul agreements. Now, security requirements have become a separate issue, and regulating our relations over Crimea, Sevastopol and Donbass will be taken out of the scope of these agreements. That is, they have returned to a dead-end for themselves and for all of us.

I was told that the Ukrainian side made some changes again last

night. I am not aware of what these changes are. But this kind of inconsistency regarding fundamental issues creates certain difficulties on the negotiating track if we want to reach final agreements that are acceptable to everyone. And until this happens, the military operation will continue until it is completed and the goals that were set at the beginning of this operation are fulfilled.

As for the united West, this became obvious long ago. I believe the media can see it as well, but this is not a subject they are comfortable with.

What is behind its consolidation? It is Europe's insulting and humiliating position with regard to its sovereign, that is, the United States. You may remember that the British press once referred to a former British prime minister – I will not name him here – as “the US President's poodle.” Isn't that insulting?

However, it is a fact of life that nearly all of the European countries' leaders are in the same irritating position, but they cannot talk about it. It is unpleasant and shameful to talk about it. Today they have Russian aggression and a common enemy. It is a convenient pretext for closing ranks and serving US interests. They have always served them, but today they can do it openly, taking decisions that benefit the United States, including in the economy, and explaining it by the need to repel an aggressor. This is what I think is happening now.

But the public in these countries, especially when people face the problems created by this political line, yes, they succumb to the general rhetoric, the anti-Russia hysteria. But I assure you that time will put everything in its place. When people see growing

fuel and food prices and an unprecedented inflation rate, this will certainly influence the domestic political process.

They wanted very much for the developments to affect the internal political processes in the Russian Federation. But they always miscalculate, unable to understand that the Russian people always pull together in times of trouble. They will see this yet, and their own problems are inevitable. They want to create these problems for us, and they are doing it. Yes, it will be difficult for some sectors, but we will deal with these difficulties.

Dmitry Peskov: This will be all. Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: *Komsomolskaya Pravda* has a question.

Remark: A very short question, if I may.

Vladimir Putin: Go ahead.

Question: Since there are two presidents here, I have a question that may not be all that serious.

About two months ago, President Lukashenko said in an injured voice that he had asked Vladimir Putin to promote him to colonel, because he was still a lieutenant colonel. "If Putin promotes me to colonel, I will promote him to general," he said. How much of this is a joke?

Vladimir Putin: Mr Lukashenko does not need the head of a foreign state to promote him. He is a big boss himself.

As you now, I do not have a general's rank, but I serve my people honestly. And besides, ranks are for military personnel.

As for President Lukashenko, he is on the frontline, and so he needs general's stars more than I do. But then, this is something for him to decide.

Alexander Lukashenko: It would be great if I were a colonel as well. The truth is that he did promise to promote me but has not acted on his word. (*Laughter*)

Vladimir Putin: If I promised, then I will do it. Will this be all?

Dmitry Peskov: Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

Alexander Lukashenko: Thank you, everyone.

See also