

Vladimir Putin comments on situation in Donbass following second-round presidential election in Ukraine on April 21

Excerpt from the press conference held by President Vladimir Putin following a summit meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Vladivostok, Russia on April 24, 25, 2019. [Published on the website of the President of Russia, April 25, 2019.](#)

... **Question:** Mr President, yesterday you signed an executive order introducing a fast-track procedure for issuing Russian passports to Lugansk residents. Are you aware of the fact that the response around the world and in Ukraine to this initiative was overwhelmingly negative? By doing so, aren't you provoking the country's new president, Vladimir Zelensky?

Vladimir Putin: Are you saying that there was a negative response? It is strange when decisions of this kind are met with a negative response. Let me explain. Poland, for example, has been issuing identity cards to ethnic Poles for as long as ten years, I think, since 2009. Hungary and Romania went as far as give away passports to ethnic Hungarians and Romanians, respectively.

In this connection there is a question: are ethnic Russians living in Ukraine worse than Romanians, Poles or Hungarians, or Ukrainians who live there but feel an unbreakable bond with Russia due to various circumstances (family ties, mixed marriages or other considerations)? I do not see anything extraordinary in this regard.

Moreover, when other countries neighbouring Ukraine have been doing the same for many years, why should Russia refrain from taking the same steps, especially since people living in Donetsk and Lugansk republics are in a much more challenging situation than the ethnic Poles, Romanians and Hungarians living in Ukraine? In fact, they face a lot of hardship. They are deprived of the most basic human rights, for example in education. They even have problems moving around Ukraine or third countries, and even in Russia. Sometimes they cannot even buy a plane or train ticket. This is beyond all reason.

As for provoking anyone, the government and I personally are far from provoking anyone. The question of passports is a purely humanitarian issue and nothing more. As for the current Ukrainian authorities and those set to replace them, both the outgoing and the incoming leadership, as far as I know, and judging by their public statements, have never intended and will not sign off on an amnesty bill. They do not intend to recognise the special status of the Lugansk and Donetsk people's republics. These are the key provisions of the Minsk Agreements. This means that they do not intend to implement the Minsk Agreements.

But what about the people who live there? Will they be abandoned? Will they continue to live in complete isolation? After all, it was not Russia that isolated them, but the Kiev authorities. We were not the ones who did it. This also directly contradicts the Minsk Agreements. They have not restored anything, neither the economic ties, nor financial relations. Nothing. In addition, these people face humanitarian issues. It goes without saying that we cannot stand by and just let it be this way.

That said, provoking anyone is not what we are after. If Ukraine's incoming leadership finds the courage to implement the Minsk Agreements, we will facilitate these efforts and will do everything to bring the situation back to normal in southeast Ukraine.

Question: To continue on the subject, what is your general assessment of the election in Ukraine? What do you think about the development of Russian-Ukrainian relations with the new President?

Vladimir Putin: I do not know. It will depend on the policy pursued by Ukraine's new political leadership. We want and are ready to restore these relations in full but we cannot do it unilaterally.

As for my assessment, what is there to assess? This is a complete failure of Poroshenko's policy. Complete and absolute. I am sure that the new authorities are bound to understand this. They are well aware of this. Let's look at their first steps at least. Understanding is one thing but adopting a realistic policy in the interests of one's nation is another.

Question: To continue the topic of your executive order, Poroshenko is now trying to rally his partners to convene the UN Security Council. As for the Western reaction, the term of "territorial integrity" is being used. Does your executive order concern Ukraine's territorial integrity because the President that is still in office qualified it as an attempt at annexation and formation of a Russian enclave on Ukrainian territory?

Vladimir Putin: Look, I think I have already answered this question. When other neighbouring states issued passports, there were no attempts to submit this question to the UN Security Council. But why are they being made in this case? What is the difference? There is none at all. The only thing is that people living in the Lugansk and Donetsk people's republics are in a much worse position. This is a humanitarian issue. Well, let him submit it and we will discuss it.

At one time Mr Poroshenko suggested there should be a UN presence on these territories for protecting and ensuring the security of OSCE observers. We agreed but our Ukrainian partners instantly rejected the idea. They demanded more than that, notably, that everything should be transferred to the UN forces. This is a separate issue and it may be discussed. However, this is not a desire to resolve the issue through dialogue with the people who live on these territories. These are all attempts to bend them in this or that way, to resolve these issues by using force, either directly or indirectly, and, in effect to settle the legitimacy issue with regard to the government produced by the coup d'état.

Thank you. I wish you all the best.