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Putin: Russians need to engage, but have no confrontation with wider world

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14/08/2014



Russians must consolidate and develop their country, neither sliding into isolationism nor sacrificing their dignity for the sake of pleasing anyone, President Vladimir Putin declared.

*"We have to develop our country with calm, dignity and efficiency, without barricading ourselves from the outer world or breaking ties with partners, but also without allowing anyone to treat us with disrespect,"* he told Russian MPs in Yalta, Crimea.

He called on a consolidation of the people, *"not for the sake of any wars or conflict,"* but *"for an industrious labor force for Russia and in Russia's name."*

The president defended sanctions of food imports, which the Russian government imposed in response to several rounds of anti-Russian sanctions of the West.

*"It's not just a response. First of all, it's support for domestic producers and the opening of our markets to the countries and producers, who want and are willing to cooperate with Russia,"* Putin said.

Whatever the foreign relations of Russia are, *"our focus now is on domestic affairs, on the goals and tasks which the people of Russia challenge us with,"* he added.

Western nations, championed by the US, have imposed several series of sanctions against a number of Russian companies and individuals to punish Moscow for what they see as aggression against Ukraine.

The Kremlin believes that the policy is counterproductive and hypocritical, since the political crisis in Ukraine, which escalated into a civil war in the eastern parts of the country, was to a large extent caused by Washington and Brussels.

Relations between Russia and Western powers are at their worst point since the Cold War, as the parties appear to be starting a trade war.

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