

Meeting with President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko

Vladimir Putin met with President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko in the Constantine Palace.

July 23, 2023 12:10 St Petersburg

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Mr Lukashenko, as agreed, we are meeting today...

President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko: As we agreed six months ago.

Vladimir Putin: This is true. We agreed a long time ago. We are meeting today in St Petersburg. The weather is good, it is Sunday today, but we always have things to discuss.

To begin with, I would like to note that all our plans are being implemented, and even faster than you and I expected.

I would like to highlight the sound performance of the Russian and Belarusian economies. I checked the latest data: this year Belarus is expected to achieve economic growth of 3.7 percent. It is a forecast, but nevertheless. Our figure is a bit lower, but I can tell that this is also a good indicator for us, we are expecting growth of more than two percent. Your deficit is minimal – 0.4 percent. This is also very good. International reserves are at a decent, very good level. Unemployment is low. To sum up, all the main indicators give us reason to believe that we will go through this year confidently and calmly and will post good growth.

Plans to build the Union State are being implemented in full. We are moving steadily in this regard.

Trade is growing. The data varies, and according to our information, the US dollar equivalent amounts to around 43.7 billion, as per the Belarusian statistics, it is almost 45.

Alexander Lukashenko: Services.

Vladimir Putin: Yes, services, you are correct, 45 billion US dollars. This is a very good rate.

I believe the nuclear power plant has already generated 17,000 [gigawatt hours]. The second unit will be launched this year.

Alexander Lukashenko: It is already starting to operate, we are mastering the operational process.

Vladimir Putin: Great. So, everything is moving, at least, let's say modestly, satisfactorily.

We will touch upon the security issues in the region – you know what I am talking about.

I hope that we will have a chance to discuss this very thoroughly and in detail today and tomorrow in an informal setting.

Welcome!

Alexander Lukashenko: Thank you, Mr Putin.

I would like you to listen to what I have to say. I have specifically singled out several issues. You have covered the economy so thoroughly – this is indeed good news. The economy is the cornerstone. If we have a [stable] economy, we will resolve all other issues.

I would like to start with the work of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Yesterday was a difficult day for us, according to our data, and you will share your opinion later. A very difficult day. Fortunately, it ended on a good note. According to our data, I wrote it down,

more than 15 Leopards and over 20 Bradleys were destroyed in a single battle. I believe there have never been so many foreign military vehicles destroyed.

Vladimir Putin: I suppose, so many foreign vehicles have never been destroyed in one day. This is because units fully stocked with foreign vehicles were acting from that side.

Alexander Lukashenko: Absolutely true.

This is why it is possible to give an approximate estimate of how many Ukrainian soldiers were killed, unfortunately, with so many vehicles destroyed. I know this because I served as an officer on an armoured vehicle, so this is why I understand what it is like to destroy so many APCs and, first and foremost, these highly-praised Leopards.

According to estimates by the United States of America, the irretrievable personnel losses of the Ukrainian Armed Forces since the beginning of the counter-terrorist operation 26,000.

Vladimir Putin: More.

Alexander Lukashenko: The figure is higher now, but these are their estimates as of last week: more than 26,000 since June 4. I wrote their data down.

Vladimir Putin: Even more.

Alexander Lukashenko: Yesterday showed – this is why I am telling you this – that we are forced to fight a war against the entire NATO bloc. The armaments are theirs, they have engaged quite a high number of mercenaries, and what is no less important, why yesterday is important, they are engaging the main strategic reserves. This is evidence that this thoughtless policy of throwing unprepared people and mercenaries into the midst of a battle will lead to nothing. But there is no counter-offensive. What's next?

Vladimir Putin: No, there is, it is simply failing.

Alexander Lukashenko: It has failed. No results. What's next?

They – exactly as you said recently – started involving Poland and are actively engaging mercenaries. I have specially brought a map for you, showing Polish armed forces projection to the borders of the Union State, what you have spoken about.

We see that they are setting the stage. Let's assume that one brigade finds itself 40 kilometres from Brest. They were 500 km away from Brest, now they have been redeployed to a distance of 40 km. I will show you the map, we see all of it.

And the second brigade is being deployed just over 100 kilometres from Grodno. They have a division, but at the moment brigades are approaching.

The Poles have opened a repair centre for Leopards in the country: an airfield has been activated in Rzeszow, where the Americans and the rest deploy their vehicles and then they are deployed to the area. Engagement of mercenaries and so forth – such is the case with Poland. I will explain why I want to draw your attention to this issue, although I would like to stress: you put this very precisely and correctly at the Security Council.

Of course, Poland raises a question: what does it get in exchange? It is clear: money, armaments, this is clear. But now, you have also noted this, there is a lot of speculation about Ukraine gaining admission to NATO piecemeal. What is behind this? This is a smoke screen. What you said is behind all of this.

Vladimir Putin: Western Ukraine.

Alexander Lukashenko: Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, of course, but we are talking about Poland now. Tearing off this western piece of Ukraine: under the guise of NATO accession, to mislead the population. They want to chop off western Ukraine and join it to Poland. This is the payment for the active participation of the Poles in this operation, against the forces of the Russian Federation, of course. This is supported by the Americans. I told you this a long time ago, we witnessed this six months ago and discussed it preliminarily. Why am I telling you all this? It is unacceptable to us, Mr Putin. It is unacceptable to tear off western Ukrainian, dismember Ukraine and hand over these lands to Poland. And if, naturally, the western population of Ukraine needs this, we will be supporting them, of course.

I am asking you to discuss this issue and think it through. Obviously, I would like you to support us in this regard. With this support, and if western Ukraine asks for this help,

we will definitely provide assistance and support to the western population of Ukraine. If this is the case, we will render all possible support. This is unacceptable as we are exposed to the military influence of the Balts and the Poles from the west, and from the south, as it would turn out. The Union State – we will have to defend ourselves in any event. This is why such approaches are unacceptable.

This concerns our security agenda, this is what worries us. I am not talking about western Belarus, I just want to say thank you. You are the first man in Russia to speak openly, clearly and comprehensibly about this. God forbid, aggression against Belarus is just like against Russia. We are taking this into account in developing our armed forces.

Maybe I should not be saying this but I will nevertheless, the Wagner mercenaries have started getting on our nerves. They are asking permission to go west: “Allow us!” And I say: “Why do you need to go there, to the west?” And they say on the sly – we are controlling what is happening: “We will go for an excursion to Warsaw and Rzeszow.” And Rzeszow is unacceptable to them. They fought on the outskirts of Artemovsk and they knew where the vehicles were coming from, and this stays with them: “Rzeszow is trouble.” And, of course, I am holding them, as we agreed, in central Belarus, I would not want to redeploy them, because they are in low spirits, and, I would like to give credit, they know what is happening around the Union State.

But that is no big deal. We will be opposing this by all means and I am asking you to consider this issue, in terms of our support, concerning western Ukraine.

As for the economy, I have said this already, but I would like to ask our governments to come up with some economic plan. I wrote it down – relying only on ourselves. We will not give in to anyone, we have the brains, we have more than enough resources and we need to build a development plan for our Motherland – as I say: “Two states, one Motherland,” and we are able to do this. But the main forces have been here, in Russia for a long time, and if our governments work out this plan, this will be good. Even if it gets a bit worse here, people would understand and support us, because they would see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Moreover, we have already started doing something: microelectronics, space and the rest, agriculture – and we see positive beginnings everywhere. So, we need to consolidate this plan, assign those responsible, and we will strategically accomplish our work on this. Because this is what I wanted to discuss with you, one day is not

enough for this. This is why we will spend some time tomorrow. As far as I understand, you will find some time to have a conversation.

Vladimir Putin: Of course. I changed some of my plans. We will be able to spend one and a half – two days easily.

Alexander Lukashenko: We will settle these issues in one and a half days. Thank you for fulfilling the promise you made six months ago about this meeting, so there is nothing out of the ordinary here: we scheduled it a long time ago and we are meeting. If needed, at any time, as we always say, we will meet and discuss our tactical and strategic questions.

Vladimir Putin: As for the foreign mercenaries, they are sustaining substantial casualties too.

Alexander Lukashenko: Heavy.

Vladimir Putin: Yes.

Alexander Lukashenko: Because of their tactics.

Vladimir Putin: Because of their stupidity.

Alexander Lukashenko: Because they move in small groups there.

Vladimir Putin: In any case, the general public in the countries whose governments are now sending people to the war zone must be aware of what is going on there. And we will communicate this to people so that they can assess the actions of their leaders.

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