

Quotes from Vladimir Putin

Russia

Russia is an ancient country with historical, profound traditions and a very powerful moral foundation. And this foundation is a love for the Motherland and patriotism. Patriotism in the best sense of that word. Incidentally, I think that to a certain extent, to a significant extent, this is also attributable to the American people. *Munich speech, 2007*

The State

For us, the state and its institutions and structures have always played an exceptionally important role in the life of the country and the people. For Russians, a strong state is not an anomaly to fight against. Quite the contrary, it is the source and guarantor of order, the initiator and the main driving force of a change . . . Society desires the restoration of the guiding and regulating role of the state. *Millennium message, 1999*

The Soviet collapse

We went essentially through the breakup of a state: the Soviet Union broke up. And what is the Soviet Union? It is Russia, only it had a different name. *2011*

Above all, we should acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian¹ nation, it became a genuine tragedy. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration affected Russia itself. *2005*

Power and resurgence

Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy. We are not going to change this tradition today. *Munich speech, 2007*

¹ Putin's term is *rossiiskii*, meaning not just ethnic Russians (*russkii*) but all those members of the extended "Russian" family, including Jews, Tatars, Ukrainians, Belarusians and others. The Russian (*rossiiskii*) nation can be a very ambiguous idea, with fuzzy conceptual and geographic boundaries.

Russia has experienced one of the most difficult periods in its many centuries of history. Perhaps for the first time in 200-300 years, she faces the danger of becoming not just a second but a third tier country. To prevent this from happening, we need an immense effort from all the nation's intellectual, physical, and moral forces. Everything now depends on our own ability to recognize the level of danger, to unify and rally ourselves and get ourselves ready for prolonged and difficult labor.

Millennium message, 1999

If the question is whether we want law-based relations [with the West], the answer is yes, but only if our national economic and security interests are absolutely respected.

Press conference, December 2014

No one will ever attain military superiority over Russia.

State of the Nation, December 2014

The economy

Colleagues, the quality and the size of the Russian economy must be consistent with our geopolitical and historical role. We must escape the trap of zero-level growth and achieve an above-average global growth rate within the next three to four years. This is the only way to increase Russia's share in the global economy, and thus strengthen our influence and economic independence.

State of the Nation, December 2014

Capitalism in Russia

During the acute phase of that crisis [of 2008-2009], some colleagues, including some who are in this room right now, asked whether they shouldn't fully transfer their business to the state. They were ready to do that and themselves even proposed it. . . . We chose a different path. We supported the private entrepreneur, we backed you up, gave you loans, helped you refinance from Western banks, put up collateral . . . but we did not proceed toward

nationalization of our economy. This is a fundamental choice of the government: we don't want to create state capitalism. . . . It would have been easy back then to take over, to seize, private business (and we could have done it on the cheap). It was more difficult to preserve private business. 2012

Conscientious work, private property, the freedom of enterprise – these are the same kind of fundamental conservative values as patriotism, and respect for the history, traditions, and culture of one's country.

State of the Nation, December 2014

Moral values, national traditions, and conservatism

Today, many nations are revising their moral values and ethical norms, eroding ethnic traditions and differences between peoples and cultures. Society is now required not only to recognise everyone's right to the freedom of consciousness, political views and privacy, but also to accept without question the equality of good and evil, strange as it seems, concepts that are opposite in meaning. This destruction of traditional values from above not only leads to negative consequences for society, but is also essentially anti-democratic, since it is carried out on the basis of abstract, speculative ideas, contrary to the will of the majority, which does not accept the changes occurring or the proposed revision of values.

We know that there are more and more people in the world who support our position on defending traditional values that have made up the spiritual and moral foundation of civilisation in every nation for thousands of years: the values of traditional families, real human life, including religious life, not just material existence but also spirituality, the values of humanism and global diversity.

Of course, this is a conservative position. But speaking in the words of Nikolai Berdyaev, the point of conservatism is not that it prevents movement forward and upward, but that it prevents movement backward and downward, into chaotic darkness and a return to a primitive state.

In recent years, we have seen how attempts to push supposedly more progressive development models onto other nations actually resulted in regression, barbarity and extensive bloodshed. 2013

Ukraine

Excerpts from Putin's long article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" July 12, 2021. Full text at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>

During the recent Direct Line, when I was asked about Russian-Ukrainian relations, I said that Russians and Ukrainians were one people – a single whole.

First of all, I would like to emphasize that the wall that has emerged in recent years between Russia and Ukraine, between the parts of what is essentially the same historical and spiritual space, to my mind is our great common misfortune and tragedy. These are, first and foremost, the consequences of our own mistakes made at different periods of time. But these are also the result of deliberate efforts by those forces that have always sought to undermine our unity. The formula they apply has been known from time immemorial – divide and rule. There is nothing new here. Hence the attempts to play on the "national question" and sow discord among people, the overarching goal being to divide and then to pit the parts of a single people against one another.

In 1922, when the USSR was created, with the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic becoming one of its founders, a rather fierce debate among the Bolshevik leaders resulted in the implementation of Lenin's plan to form a union state as a federation of equal republics. The right for the republics to freely secede from the Union was included in the text of the Declaration on the Creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and, subsequently, in the 1924 USSR Constitution. By doing so, the authors planted in the foundation of our statehood the most dangerous time bomb, which exploded the moment the safety mechanism provided by the leading role of the CPSU was gone . . .

This Soviet national policy secured at the state level the provision on three separate Slavic peoples: Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian, instead of the large Russian nation, a triune people comprising Velikorussians, Malorussians and Belorussians.

Inside the USSR, borders between republics were never seen as state borders; they were nominal within a single country. But in 1991, all those territories, and, which is more important, people, found themselves abroad overnight, taken away from their historical motherland.

Ukraine and Russia have developed as a single economic system over decades and centuries. The profound cooperation we had 30 years ago is an example for the European Union to look up to.

Ukraine used to possess great potential, which included powerful infrastructure, gas transportation system, advanced shipbuilding, aviation, rocket and instrument engineering industries, as well as world-class scientific, design and engineering schools. . . Today, high-tech industrial giants that were once the pride of Ukraine and the entire Union, are sinking. Engineering output has dropped by 42 per cent over ten years. The scale of deindustrialization and overall economic degradation is visible in Ukraine's electricity production, which has seen a nearly two-time decrease in 30 years. Nowadays, Ukraine is Europe's poorest country.

Russia is still one of Ukraine's top three trading partners, and hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians are coming to us to work, and they find a welcome reception and support.

When the USSR collapsed, many people in Russia and Ukraine sincerely believed and assumed that our close cultural, spiritual and economic ties would certainly last. However, events – at first gradually, and then more rapidly – started to move in a different direction.

Ukraine's ruling circles decided to justify their country's independence through the denial of its past. They began to mythologize and rewrite history, edit out everything that united us, and refer to the period when Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as an occupation. The common tragedy of collectivization and famine of the early 1930s was portrayed as the genocide of the Ukrainian people.

Radicals and neo-Nazis were open and more and more insolent about their ambitions. They were indulged by both the official authorities and local oligarchs, who robbed the people of Ukraine and kept their stolen money in Western banks, ready to sell their motherland for the sake of preserving their capital.

Step by step, Ukraine was dragged into a dangerous geopolitical game aimed at turning Ukraine into a barrier between Europe and Russia, a springboard against Russia.

In 2014 . . .the legitimate public discontent, caused by acute socio-economic problems, mistakes, and inconsistent actions of the authorities of the time, was simply cynically exploited. Western countries directly interfered in Ukraine's internal affairs and supported the coup. Radical nationalist groups served as its battering ram. Their slogans, ideology, and blatant aggressive Russophobia have to a large extent become defining elements of state policy in Ukraine.

The situation in Ukraine today involves a forced change of identity. And the most despicable thing is that the Russians in Ukraine are being forced not only to deny their roots, generations of their ancestors but also to believe that Russia is their enemy. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the path of forced assimilation, the formation of an ethnically pure Ukrainian state, aggressive towards Russia, is comparable in its consequences to the use of weapons of mass destruction against us. As a result of such a harsh and artificial division of Russians and Ukrainians, the Russian people in all may decrease by hundreds of thousands or even millions.

For the Ukrainians who fought in the Red Army, in partisan units, the Great Patriotic War was indeed a patriotic war because they were defending their home, their great common Motherland.

The anti-Russia project has been rejected by millions of Ukrainians. The people of Crimea and residents of Sevastopol made their historic choice. The residents of Donetsk and Lugansk took up arms to defend their home, their language and their lives.

The inhabitants of these regions will never accept the order impose[d] by force, blockade and threats. And I would add – under the protection and control of the Western powers.

We are facing the creation of a climate of fear in Ukrainian society, aggressive rhetoric, indulging neo-Nazis and militarizing the country. We are witnessing not just complete dependence but direct external control, including the supervision of the Ukrainian authorities, security services and armed forces by foreign

advisers, military "development" of the territory of Ukraine and deployment of NATO infrastructure.

This is also a disguise for the takeover of the rest of the Ukrainian economy and the exploitation of its natural resources.

In the anti-Russia project, there is no place either for a sovereign Ukraine or for the political forces that are trying to defend its real independence.

We will never allow our historical territories and people close to us living there to be used against Russia.

The incumbent authorities in Ukraine like to refer to Western experience, seeing it as a model to follow. Just have a look at how Austria and Germany, the USA and Canada live next to each other. Close in ethnic composition, culture, in fact sharing one language, they remain sovereign states with their own interests, with their own foreign policy. But this does not prevent them from the closest integration or allied relations. They have very conditional, transparent borders. And when crossing them the citizens feel at home. They create families, study, work, do business. Incidentally, so do millions of those born in Ukraine who now live in Russia. We see them as our own close people.

Russia is open to dialogue with Ukraine. But it is important for us to understand that [Ukraine] is defending its national interests and is not a tool in someone else's hands to fight against us.

We respect the Ukrainian language and traditions. We respect Ukrainians' desire to see their country free, safe and prosperous.

I am confident that true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia. Our spiritual, human and civilizational ties formed for centuries and have their origins in the same sources, they have been hardened by common trials, achievements and victories. Our kinship has been transmitted from generation to generation. It is in the hearts and the memory of people living in modern Russia and Ukraine, in the blood ties that unite millions of our families. Together we have always been and will be many times stronger and more successful. For we are one people.