
Press Conference following Talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN: Ladies and Gentlemen, our talks with Ms Angela Merkel, the federal chancellor of Germany, have just ended. It is noteworthy that these talks have taken place during the first weeks of 2007, as this once again confirms our two countries' mutual aspiration to maintain a high level of mutually enriching dialogue and further develop our multifaceted cooperation.

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Our ongoing talks will focus on achieving a peace settlement in the Middle East based on the Roadmap that has been recognised by all sides. We support the Federal Chancellor's efforts to hold a meeting of the quartet of mediators as soon as possible in order to propose a comprehensive solution to bringing lasting peace to the region.

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We also discussed international issues today. One subject of discussion was, of course, the Middle East, and we fully agree that resuming the quartet's work on the Middle East would be a positive step. We will be meeting soon and must therefore make every effort to ensure that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is resolved in accordance with the Roadmap, because resolving this conflict will have a big impact on other conflicts in the region.

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QUESTION: Ms Federal Chancellor, were you able to persuade the Russian President to influence Syria in order to resolve the situation in the Middle East? And a question for you, Mr President: you have met a couple of times now with the Federal Chancellor. Is there any difference with the preceding federal chancellor, and what nature does it take?

ANGELA MERKEL: We discussed the situation in the Middle East in general, but we have not yet discussed specific issues. We will do so at dinner tonight. My position is that Russia and the European Union and Germany all have an interest in getting the maximum number of partners involved in finding a constructive solution. This concerns the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation with Iran. It also concerns Lebanon's sovereignty, and I know from the Russian President that we both want to see sovereign development in Lebanon. [Lebanese] Prime Minister Siniora visited Moscow and there are various ways in which we could get Syria involved in a solution. Personally, I can say that our foreign minister was in Syria recently, but that we have not seen progress as yet, unfortunately. We will continue to support Syria's involvement, however, because we need every country in the region that is taking an active part in resolving this conflict.

VLADIMIR PUTIN: We are working actively with all the countries involved in the conflict in the Middle East. I have met with the Syrian President and with Prime Minister Siniora. The Federal Chancellor has mentioned this. I must say that Russia and Germany hold close positions on these issues. I think that we are working constructively together and are combining our efforts in order to resolve one of the most complex problems in international politics.

I have nothing to add here. There are a great many details, but our positions are close. There is no need to convince us of anything. We agree overall on what is happening and we agree on the possible solutions to the problem, including with respect to our approach regarding the use of force. We consider the use of force unacceptable in this region.

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