

Countries Variable in Greeting Putin Presidential Win

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President-elect Vladimir Putin on Tuesday received numerous phone calls and communiques from foreign leaders on the occasion of his electoral victory Sunday, but the tone of the congratulatory messages was markedly mixed.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad expressed a "heartfelt congratulation" for Putin's victory, adding that he asked "God the Almighty" for Putin's success and "prosperity and well-being for the Russian nation," [according](#) to the IRNA state news agency.

Victory congratulations also arrived from Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Syria's Bashar Assad, as well as from leaders of former Soviet states like Belarus and Kazakhstan, who maintain strong ties with Moscow.

By contrast, reactions from the European Union and the United States were decidedly muted.

Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron called Putin late Monday, but a [statement](#) on his website did not mention congratulations. Instead it said both leaders "agreed on the importance of building a stronger relationship, without disguising differences and areas of concern."

Earlier Monday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel became the first Western leader to call Putin, but she too wished him well for his next term in office instead of congratulating him, according to a [statement](#) on her website.

The word congratulation was, however, used by French President Nicholas Sarkozy, who reminded Putin in a letter of what he saw as the Kremlin's future tasks.

"Press ahead with the work of democratic and economic modernization to which, in accordance with the wishes expressed by the Russian people, you want to dedicate this new term," Sarkozy [wrote](#), according to a translation carried by Reuters.

Notably absent from the list of well-wishers was U.S. President Barack Obama.

Washington merely published a State Department statement Monday that congratulated "the Russian people on the completion of the presidential elections," without mentioning Putin by name.

The White House's silence irritated some officials Tuesday.

"A poor start, if Obama wants decent relations," Alexei Pushkov, the State Duma's foreign relations committee chairman, [wrote](#) on Twitter, adding that Japan, Germany and China had already congratulated Putin.

The tone in the reactions was also notably different from four years ago, when Western leaders were quick to welcome the election of Dmitry Medvedev to the presidency.

Among them was then-U.S. President George W. Bush, whose spokesman said one day after the March 2008 election that the United States looked forward to working with Medvedev.

A U.S. Embassy spokesman said Tuesday that he did not know whether the White House was planning to issue a statement.

European Commission President Jose Barroso, who had congratulated Medvedev in March 2008, was also silent this time, as was European Council President Herman van Rompuy.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said in a statement Monday that Brussels trusts that "the new Russian president will be ready to take [economic and political] reforms forward, in dialogue with citizens and civil society."

However, a senior European diplomat said no further congratulations should be expected from Brussels before Putin's inauguration, which is scheduled for May 7. But the diplomat stressed that this does not mean that Europeans won't engage with Putin.

"We want to be brisk and businesslike, and we're looking forward to working with him — we have to," he said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the

media.

In contrast to Medvedev, who has championed giving Moscow's foreign policy a "friendlier face," Putin has made strong anti-Western and anti-American remarks in his election campaign. He repeatedly accused Washington of funding the organizers of the massive protests against him and of accepting "no partners but only vassals."

Some analysts said it was wrong to give Putin the cold shoulder now.

"The West is doing itself a disservice because with this, Putin will see his anti-Western gut feelings confirmed," said Vladislav Belov of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations.

Belov added that if Western leaders were still disappointed that Putin will be the next president, they should have voiced their criticism earlier.

"They should have spoken out after September 24," he said, referring to the United Russia party convention when Medvedev declared that he was not seeking a second term and endorsed Putin.

But others criticized the official European and American reaction as too soft.

Guy Verhofstadt, a former Belgian prime minister who leads a liberal faction in the European Parliament, said it was a scandal that Cameron had called Putin and incomprehensible that Ashton's statement spoke of his "clear victory."

"What sort of victory are we talking about? he said in an e-mailed statement Tuesday. He added that it would be "an enormous mistake" to do business as usual with Putin after the election and that it was necessary "to maintain the pressure."

Conservative U.S. blogger Jennifer Rubin lambasted the State Department's statement as mealy-mouthed.

"No condemnation. No rejection of the results as invalid. No protest over the arrest of an opposition leader," she [wrote](#) in the Washington Post.

One leader who probably pleased Rubin and Verhofstadt was Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who lambasted the Russian election as irrelevant.

"Whatever elections they hold or stage, ... they have no future because they are building the past," Saakashvili said in a speech Monday, the Civil.ge news site [reported](#).

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