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Putin Upbraided for Lateness, Rudeness by Ukrainian Minister

By Alexander Winning

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Putin speaking with Zaldostanov, right, on Thursday. The visit delayed Putin's arrival to a summit by four hours. **Mikhail Klimentyev**

Ukraine's emergency situations minister accused President Vladimir Putin of rudeness and said he was left with gloomy impressions after a Russian-Ukrainian summit in the Black Sea resort city of Yalta.

"Yesterday I was at a commission with the Russians. Dreadful impressions. There was a great deal of bad manners, which shook the welcoming Ukrainians," Viktor Baloga wrote on his Facebook page Friday.

But it was Putin, who turned up four hours late to the summit after making an unscheduled visit to old friend Alexander Zaldostanov, leader of the Night Wolves bikers' club, who bore the brunt of Baloga's scorn.

“President Putin exceeded the limits of lateness,” he said. “He traveled to bikers and their war brides, this was his priority.”

Putin rode with Zaldostanov in an August 2011 motorcycle show in Novorossiisk and previously met with him at another bikers show in Ukraine in 2010.

Baloga also accused Putin of rudeness for speaking while Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych addressed the summit.

“It’s discourteous to interrupt when the host of the meeting is speaking,” said Baloga, who headed former President Viktor Yushchenko’s administration prior to his ministerial appointment. “It’s clear that Putin doesn’t know this rule. He was talking throughout President Yanukovych’s speech.”

Commenting on Russian proposals at the meeting to join the customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan, which Putin has made a priority of his third term as president, Baloga was similarly disparaging.

“Here the Russians applied their coercive tactics,” he said, explaining that the Russians had acted like it didn’t matter to them whether Ukraine joined the customs union but it was in Ukraine’s interest to do so.

The Kremlin on Friday rushed to stress that Baloga’s comments were his private opinion and that the conference had yielded positive results.

Putin’s spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said that the president had only dropped in on Zaldostanov and his fellow bikers for a few minutes and that their meeting was of “an exclusively work-related nature,” RIA-Novosti reported.

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