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Putin Lays Out Illegal Migration Agenda During Annual Address

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Vladimir Putin delivering his State of the Nation address on Thursday.

President Vladimir Putin touched upon the burning topic of illegal migration and Russia's relations with former Soviet republics during his State of the Nation address on Thursday.

Control over illegal migration will be tightened, yet ties with neighboring countries will be strengthened, Putin said.

He proposed creating barriers for migrants from countries that have visa-free regime with Russia and who have criminal business interests in Russia, or work illegally.

“Those who violate migration rules will be banned from coming to Russia for a period of three to 10 years, depending on the gravity of the offence,” he said.

He also said that migrants who stay in Russia for a long time without any clear purpose should have their periods of stay limited.

He said that interethnic conflicts were mostly caused not by migrants but by Russians, particularly those from Russia's southern regions, as well as law enforcement authorities that "protect ethnic mafia," Russian nationalists and separatists.

He added that Russia should strengthen ties with CIS countries, partly by attracting students from there to receive higher education in Russia. To make that happen, the government needs to devise measures that will allow diplomas obtained in CIS-based universities to be accepted in Russia and vice versa, he said.

Talking about Russia's policy at the post-Soviet area, he said Russia didn't put any pressure on the neighboring countries.

"We neither infringe on anyone's interests, nor forcibly impose our protection, or teach how to live," he said. "We've been always proud of our country but we are not aiming to be a superpower and to have hegemony in the region or throughout the world," he said.

Commenting on the situation surrounding Ukraine, Putin said that the possibility of admitting Ukraine into the Customs Union would be based on equality and "real economic interests."

He said that Russia would promote integration in Eurasia and that such steps shouldn't be played off against European integration.

"We do not press anyone with anything but if our friends want to work collaboratively, we are ready to have this work done on an expert level," he said.

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