

Ukrainian Teenager Returns Putin's Gift Over 'Huge Lie'

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Andriy Senko received a commemorative watch from President Vladimir Putin 10 years ago.

A Ukrainian teenager who received a commemorative watch from President Vladimir Putin 10 years ago said he was sending the gift back because of the Russian leader's "huge lie" about supposedly wanting peace.

Andriy Senko, who turned 16 last month, met with Putin when the Russian leader visited Ukraine in October 2004 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the country's liberation from Nazi Germany in World War II.

Senko was among thousands of Ukrainian children and adults who submitted questions via the Internet to the Russian leader, and his inquiry about Putin's dreams got selected by Kremlin aides, who helped organize a meeting between the then-six-year-old and the Russian president, the Ukraine Crisis Media Center reported.

"At this meeting, Vladimir Putin told me that his dream was for all children and their parents to be happy and to live in peace," Senko said in a video posted by the Media Center.

Appealing to Putin in the video, Senko added: "But you lied to me."

"At least for that reason, I am forced to return your gift to you. And if I had an opportunity to meet with you in person, I would tell you in your face: Vladimir Vladimirovich, you are a liar," he said.

The video showed the teenager writing out Putin's address at the Kremlin on a postal form and putting the watch in a box to mail it to Moscow.

"This watch is no longer an object of pride, but evidence of a huge lie," Senko said.

When Putin visited Ukraine in 2004, he told a news conference that Moscow recognized and respected the sovereignty of its former Soviet neighbors.

"In the wake of the Soviet collapse, Russia itself should have realized that the states that appeared on the post-Soviet terrain were not a quasi-Soviet formation, but independent, full-fledged countries, and they should be treated as such," Putin said then.

Ten years later, Putin dispatched Russian troops to Crimea, effectively taking control over part of its sovereign neighbor's territory. Russian officials have suggested that Moscow may intervene in eastern parts of Ukraine as well, heightening fears of a possible war between the two Slavic, Eastern Orthodox neighbors.

Many users of social networks and news websites in Russia applauded the gesture of the Ukrainian teenager.

"Well done, kid," a reader of the Ekho Moskvyy news website said Sunday. "Except that Putin didn't lie to you only or at that time only. But to everybody and always."

Tens of thousands of protesters gathered in Moscow on the eve of Crimea's referendum on Sunday to protest the Kremlin-backed balloting, though the Russian police put the number of demonstrators at 3,000.

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