

# Putin, Merkel Hail Phone Call as Success

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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During an earlier phone call in early March Angela Merkel accused Putin of having violated international law to which Putin replied Russia's actions had been "entirely appropriate."

A phone call between President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel seemed to result in a win-win situation as both leaders issued statements portraying the talks as a success.

A [statement](#) on the German Chancellor's website said Putin had promised "the partial withdrawal of Russian troops he ordered from the eastern border of Ukraine."

"On top of that the two discussed further possible steps to stabilize the situation in Ukraine and Transdnestr," Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert said in the statement.

The Kremlin, which emphasized that Monday's had been a Russian initiative, said Putin and Merkel had discussed how the West and Moscow could help "restore stability" in Ukraine.

Putin told Merkel that Ukraine must enact constitutional reforms to ensure that the interests

of all its regions are respected, and called for measures to end what he called a "blockade" of Moldova's breakaway Transdnestr republic, his office said in a [statement](#).

Putin and Merkel also discussed "opportunities for international support for the restoration of stability" in Ukraine, the Kremlin statement said. It gave no details, but Russia has indicated it wants Western states to press the Kiev government to grant broad autonomy to Ukraine's regions.

Western officials have expressed concern that Putin may have set his sights on the pro-Russian Transdnestr republic, on Ukraine's western border, following the annexation of Crimea.

Putin's comments appeared aimed at turning the tables, blaming others for tension over Transdnestr and saying it could not be ignored.

"The Russian leader spoke of the need to take effective measures aimed at removing the de facto external blockade of this region and at searching for a fair and comprehensive solution to the Transdnestr issue," the Kremlin statement said.

Transdnestr, with a population of half a million, has run its own affairs since 1992 after fighting a brief war against the Moldovan government over fears that it might join Romania after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia has a permanent garrison of peacekeepers there.

Earlier on Monday, Germany's conservative Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble compared Russia's actions in Ukraine to Adolf Hitler's aggression in 1938 that led to the annexation of German-speaking regions of Czechoslovakia.

"We know all about that from history," Schaeuble told a group of 50 students. "Those are the methods that Hitler used to take over the Sudetenland," he said.

Merkel however was quick to distance herself from her colleague's comparison.

"I regard the case of the annexation of Crimea as a standalone case" she said at a news conference on Monday.

Schaeuble also said that it could not be ruled out that there would be a severe worsening of relations with Russia in the months ahead. He said that there are considerable fears about Russia in the Baltic nations as well as in Poland and Hungary.

"They're all crapping in their pants," he told the students.

*Material from The Moscow Times has been included in this report.*

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