

Putin Hopes Troop Dispatch to Ukraine Will Not Be Necessary

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President Vladimir Putin said Thursday he hoped he would not have to send Russian troops into eastern Ukraine, but reminded viewers of his annual call-in show that he has the approval of the upper house of the Russian parliament to do so.

“I very much hope that I will not have to use this right, and that political and diplomatic means” can be employed to solve Ukraine's problems, the president said.

Putin reiterated commitment to Russians and Russian-speakers in eastern Ukraine, saying: “We should do everything to help these people defend their rights and independently decide their fate. For that we will fight.”

Russian government officials have repeatedly said that Russian-speakers in eastern Ukraine, which has recently seen a spree of building seizures by pro-Russian separatists, are under threat from the country's new central government in Kiev.

The Federation Council, Russia's upper house of parliament, approved a request by Putin in

early March to use force in Ukraine.

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