

# Putin Says New Sanctions Unrelated to Russia's Role in Ukraine

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President Vladimir Putin speaking at a Supreme Eurasian Council press conference on Tuesday.

President Vladimir Putin has said that fresh punitive measures against Russia by the West are based on false claims of supposed Russian interference in Ukraine, insisting that Moscow has "nothing to do" with the crisis across the border.

Speaking Tuesday at a press conference in reaction to new sanctions imposed by the U.S. and the EU earlier this week, Putin called the first wave of punitive measures "illegal," and the latest round incomprehensible, a statement published on the Kremlin website said.

"As for the second so-called package, it's not even clear what this is all about," he said. "I am having trouble to explain what this is related to, because there is no cause and effect connection between what is happening in Ukraine, and Russia."

"Russia has nothing to do with it," Putin said, referring to increasing tensions in eastern

Ukraine where pro-Russian separatists have seized city halls, police stations and other government buildings in at least 10 cities and towns.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said last week there was considerable evidence to support claims of "a strong connection between Russia and the armed militants" in eastern Ukraine.

But Putin accused Moscow's Western "partners" of "searching for a guilty party" to blame for the unrest.

"We are hearing that they are our special forces, or our instructors," he said. "I am stating with full authority: There are neither Russian instructors, nor special forces, nor troops, there is nobody there."

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also lashed out Tuesday at the "sanctions declared by the U.S. and the EU, against common sense, in connection to the events in Ukraine."

"Attempts to blame one's own sins on somebody else is the strategy of weak politicians or of those who have realized that their geopolitical ambitions have failed, and are trying to take out their anger on somebody else," Lavrov said during a visit to Cuba, a transcript of his speech published on the ministry's website said.

Ahead of Russia's annexation of Crimea last month, Putin and other top Kremlin officials have also asserted that the heavily armed men in uniforms without insignia who showed up on the peninsula — looking very much like the "green men" now leading protests in eastern Ukraine — were members of local self-defense units, with no ties to Russia.

Putin's categorical denial of the Kremlin's meddling in Ukraine and his insistence that the sanctions are illegitimate enjoy wide support in Russia, a view upheld by the country's major state-controlled television channels.

The White House measures announced Tuesday comprised asset freezes and travel bans against seven more Russian officials and 17 companies close to Putin.

The EU, which had sanctioned 48 individuals since Russia's annexation of Crimea in March, also ordered similar measures Tuesday against 15 individuals, including Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak, Russian Armed Forces staff head General Valery Gerasimov, and vice speaker of the State Duma Lyudmila Shvetsova.

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