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# Putin to Commemorate World War II With EU, U.S. Leaders Despite Tensions

By The Moscow Times

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Vladimir Putin will meet Western leaders for the first time since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis.

President Vladimir Putin will meet Western leaders for the first time since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis when he attends a World War II anniversary in France next month, the Russian Ambassador to Paris said Thursday.

U.S. President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel are among those due to attend the June 6 ceremony in Normandy to mark the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings that helped turn the tide of the war against Nazi Germany.

Ambassador Alexander Orlov confirmed Putin's planned attendance in comments to BFM television, after France's president and defense minister both said the Russian leader — accused by the West of destabilizing neighboring Ukraine — was still welcome to come.

"I have told Vladimir Putin, as representative of the Russian people, that he is welcome

to attend the ceremony," President Francois Hollande said.

Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian went further, saying that canceling Putin's invitation would be a historical insult.

"It is in the order of things that (Putin) should be there," he told BFM.

The comments by Hollande and Le Drian came a day after Putin urged pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine not to go ahead with a referendum this weekend on breaking away from Ukraine. Moscow has denied Western accusations that it is orchestrating the rebellion in the east, where Ukrainian forces have been largely unable to reassert control.

Next month's ceremony commemorates the troop landings in 1944 that opened the Western Front in World War II and caught Hitler's forces in a giant pincer movement between the advancing Western allies and the Soviet army in the east.

"It was the landings that led to the Normandy campaign but the campaign would not have been successful without the Eastern front. In these moments of commemoration it is important that all of those who took part should be present," Le Drian said.

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