

Russia Will Respect the Choice of Ukrainian People, Putin Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia's President Vladimir Putin (L) attends a session of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum 2014 (SPIEF 2014) in St. Petersburg, Russia.

St. Petersburg — Russia will respect the choice of the Ukrainian people in a presidential election on Sunday, Russian President Vladimir Putin told a crowd of top government officials and business executives at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on Friday.

"We want to calm the situation and we will respect any choice Ukrainian people make," Putin said.

Animosity between Russia and the West has spiked over the ongoing political crisis in Ukraine. Russia's annexation of Crimea has prompted Western nations to sanction dozens of Russian individuals and companies since March in an effort to strong-arm Russia to fall into line with Western policy.

Putin said Sunday's vote will still be illegitimate in accordance with the Ukrainian constitution, but that Russia will respect it in order to mitigate ongoing violence in the former Soviet country.

"I just hope the violence will halt after these elections. We will work with the new Ukrainian authorities," Putin said.

Unlike for the U.S., Putin said, Ukraine is a vital country for Russia, and this is why the crisis is not subsiding.

"I personally deal with the Ukrainian crisis, while in the U.S. it is treated on a technical level," Putin said.

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