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Putin Says Anti-Russia Sanctions Violate WTO Principles

By The Moscow Times

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Russian President Vladimir Putin chairs a meeting of the presidential council at the Kremlin in Moscow.

President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that Western sanctions against Russia violated the principles of the World Trade Organization and the main way to combat them was to develop the domestic market.

At a meeting with senior officials, Putin said Russia had no intention of punishing the West for the sanctions, imposed over Moscow's role in Ukraine, and said instead they had challenged Russia to strengthen its economy, boost competition and spur lending.

"In taking responsive measures, we first of all think about our own interests regarding the task of development and protecting our producers and markets from unfair competition," Putin said.

"And our main goal is to use one of Russia's main competitive advantages — a large domestic

market, and to fill it with high-quality goods produced by our nation's firms."

The Ukraine crisis has plunged ties between the West and Russia to their lowest since the Cold War, and Putin criticized countries that imposed sanctions for violating the spirit of the WTO, which he said was fair and free economic competition.

Russia joined the WTO in 2012 after 18 years of on-and-off negotiations on the terms of its entry.

Countries enforcing trade sanctions do not have to justify them at the WTO unless they are challenged in a trade dispute. Justifications for restricting trade can range from environmental and health reasons to religious scruples.

But some diplomats fear that wide-ranging sanctions against Russia could only be explained by national security concerns. That would be a legitimate argument, but one that has never been invoked in a WTO dispute and could unravel mutual trust.

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