The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin Dubs European Migrant Crisis 'Predictable'

By Howard Amos

September 04, 2015



Russian President Vladimir Putin addresses the audience during the Eastern Economic Forum in the far eastern city of Vladivostok, Russia, Sept. 4, 2015.

President Vladimir Putin said the influx of migrants into Europe is the result of U.S. policy in the Middle East and maintained nothing unusual was happening to the Russian economy as he visited a showpiece economic forum in the country's Far East on Friday.

"It's a completely predictable crisis," Putin told journalists, according to a transcript on the Kremlin website. "We said that there would be problems on a massive scale if our so-called Western partners pursued what I always said was a mistaken foreign policy."

"What is this policy? It's the imposition of your own standards without taking into account the historical, religious, national or cultural peculiarities of these regions. Above all, these are the policies of our American partners. Europe blindly follows within the framework of its so-

called duties as an ally, and then is forced to bear the burden," Putin added.

Russian media has closely covered the problems Europe has faced from a surge in the number of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa. State-controlled NTV news channel posed the question Friday of whether shocking images of a drowned Syrian toddler washed up on a beach in Turkey represented the "drowning of European humanism."

But his words Friday were Putin's first comments on the issue. He said the way to a solution was through a coordinated battle against extremism and terrorism, as well as political efforts to rebuild the economies and social structures of the countries from which people were fleeing.

Russia has not generated the same interest as a destination for migrants as Europe, but The Wall Street Journal reported earlier this week that an increasing number of Syrian men were traveling through Russia to enter Europe via the Norwegian border in the far north of the country.

Russia has registered two Syrian people as refugees this year, the Vedomosti business daily reported Friday, citing a human rights activist.

Other Russian officials have already commented on the issue.

On Thursday, Ramzan Kadyrov, head of Russia's North Caucasus republic of Chechnya, criticized Europe's "inhuman policies" toward migrants in a post on photo-sharing site Instagram.

Economy 'Normal'

Putin made his remarks on Europe's migrant situation after a speech to investors at the inaugural Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok in the Primorye region. Putin arrived at the forum after a two-day visit to China during which he watched an enormous military parade in Beijing to commemorate the end of World War II.

A total of 65 agreements were signed during the forum worth 1.2 trillion rubles ($17.7 billion), Deputy Prime Minister and Presidential Envoy to the Far Eastern Federal District Yury Trutnev said Friday, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

In his keynote speech, Putin highlighted the investment opportunities in Russia's Far East and sought to calm fears over the Russian economy, which has suffered a sharp contraction following Western sanctions imposed over the Ukraine crisis and a falling oil price.

"The development of the territory of the Far East is a historically designated course for Russia," Putin told the forum Friday.

One of the initiatives highlighted by Putin was a law, which he said would come into force in 2016, allowing Russian citizens to claim one hectare of land — free of charge — in the Far East.

Putin downplayed fears over the Russian economy, which is set to shrink this year amid a volatile oil price that hit its lowest level since 2009 last month.

“This is all a natural process, the world economy, including the energy sector should develop on a natural path ... all this [fluctuating oil prices] will be taken, I am sure, in a completely normal, natural way. The Russian economy is already almost adjusted to this,” Putin said.

Celebrity Meetings

Aside from the forum, Putin found time to tour an aquarium being constructed on Russky Island, just off the coast of Vladivostok, in the company of U.S. actor Steven Seagal and a group of Chinese officials led by Wang Yang, the vice premier of China's State Council.

Wang reportedly observed that Putin and Seagal both had an interest in martial arts and he suggested that the two of them could take to the ring together.

“I wouldn't be up for that,” Putin replied, the Interfax news agency reported.

A frequent guest in Russia, Hollywood action movie star Seagal has described the Russian president as “one of the great living world leaders” and publicly backed Russia's annexation of the southern Ukrainian region of Crimea last year.

Putin did not meet with the other Hollywood celebrity visiting Vladivostok on Friday, Pamela Anderson. In Russia to promote her environmental and ecological campaigns, Anderson met with Russian Natural Resources Minister Sergei Donskoi on Thursday and addressed the forum Friday.

After leaving Vladivostok, Putin flew to the Siberian republic of Khakasia where he was photographed inspecting homes built for those who suffered in forest fires last year, as well as stroking a startled-looking tabby cat.

Contact the author at h.amos@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/09/04/putin-dubs-european-migrant-crisis-predictable-a49357