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Russians Want Better Ties With West, But No Change in Policy — Poll

By Eva Hartog

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Russian President Vladimir Putin meets with German Chancellor Angela Merkel

Amid a standoff over the crisis in Ukraine and ongoing conflict in Syria, most Russians want their country to mend ties with its nemeses even while maintaining its political course, the independent Levada Center pollster said Wednesday.

Seventy-five percent of those questioned in a new poll said Russia should mend ties with the United States and other Western countries.

Sixteen percent disagreed, whereas another ten percent found it hard to say.

Seventy percent of respondents wanted to see a thawing in Russia's relations with Ukraine.

When asked more concrete questions, however, most Russians appeared to support their country's existing policy.

Two-thirds of those questioned, 65 percent, said Russia should continue on its current political course, despite Western sanctions imposed on the country over its role in the Ukraine crisis. Only 26 percent was in favor of compromising for the sake of getting the sanctions lifted.

A small majority of respondents, 54 percent, felt Russia was isolated from global politics. Thirty-nine percent disagreed with that standpoint.

Russians were also asked to judge the threat level from both sides. Fifty-one percent said NATO countries had no reason to fear Russia, whereas 39 percent thought the military alliance did have reason to be concerned.

A similar number, 54 percent, thought Russia should be worried about NATO, a concern not shared by 36 percent of those questioned.

Levada Center also asked respondents to rate several countries according to their popularity.

The U.S. elicited an overwhelmingly negative response, with 70 percent of respondents rating it negatively, followed by Ukraine, with 63 percent. The European Union was rated negatively by 60 percent of respondents.

Among the most popular countries was Belarus — which was voted on favorably by 83 percent of respondents.

The poll was conducted Nov. 20 to 23 and questioned 1,600 people in 48 Russian regions.

The margin of error did not exceed 3.4 percent.

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