

Fillon: 'Unstable' Russia 'Will Never Leave Crimea'

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French conservative presidential candidate Francois Fillon reacts after his speech during a campaign meeting in Montpellier, France. **Bob Edme / AP**

French Presidential candidate Francois Fillon has dismissed calls for Russia to leave Crimea as “pointless.”

In an interview with [French newspaper Le Figaro](#) on Thursday, Fillon warned that Russia was “unstable” and “should be handled with care.”

The Republican politician said that Crimea was “historically, culturally and linguistically Russian,” but he stopped short of calling for anti-Moscow sanctions to be lifted.

“Can we lift sanctions against Russia without progress in Crimea?” [he said](#). “We have to respect two important yet contradictory principles: respect for sovereign borders and the

right to self-determination. No one doubts that Crimea has been historically, culturally and linguistically Russia, and pointless to keep demanding that Russia leaves Crimea: it's never going to happen.”

Related article: [French Presidential Hopeful Le Pen Meets Putin on Russia Trip](#)

Fillion had been seen as a forerunner in the French elections [until February this year](#), when French police began to investigate claims that he had deliberately squandered public money by hiring his wife in a nonexistent role as a “parliamentary assistant.”

He's recently made a comeback in the polls, reaching third place with 19.5 percent of the vote, according to a survey by the French Institute of Public Opinion (IFOP) on Wednesday. Centrist Emmanuel Macron from *En Marche!* (Forward!) is currently leading the polls with an estimated 23.5 percent of the vote, while Marine Le Pen from the far-right Front National has 22.5 percent.

The first round of the French presidential elections takes place this Sunday.

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