The Moscow Times
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Putin Did Not Discuss Russia-Belarus Union With Lukashenko, Kremlin Says

April 23, 2021



Putin and Lukashenko held late-night talks. **Kremlin.ru**

President Vladimir Putin did not discuss anticipated unification between Russia and Belarus during late-night talks with his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko, the Kremlin said Friday.

Lukashenko met Putin in Moscow days after he said his security services had thwarted a coup plot in Belarus, and the Russian president denounced Western silence about the claims. Their summit was preceded by speculation from analysts that the leaders could announce long-talked-about unification.

"No, the merger of the states into one" was not discussed between Putin and Lukashenko on Thursday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"As for integration, it's an ongoing process, a living mechanism," Peskov was quoted as saying by the Kommersant business daily. "Integration issues are indeed regularly on the agenda."

Putin has long pushed for closer ties in the form of a unified state with Belarus, a key transit hub for Europe-bound Russian oil that Moscow views as a buffer between Russia and the U.S.-led NATO military alliance. Lukashenko had balked at the idea until a disputed August 2020 election that triggered the biggest ever protests against his 27-year rule.

According to a Kremlin readout of their meeting, Lukashenko said that Belarus and Russia are making "good progress on union programs."

"However, some pressing issues must be resolved, including security and defense in our Union State," he said, referring to a loose bilateral integration treaty signed in 1999.

On Saturday, 66-year-old Lukashenko claimed that Belarusian security services derailed a U.S. plot to overthrow the government with Russia's help. Putin said at his annual state-of-the-nation speech Wednesday that Western countries "pretend that nothing is happening at all."

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