

Western Sanctions Speeding Up Russia and Belarus Integration, Putin Says

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Sweeping Western sanctions are only hastening integration between Russia and Belarus, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Friday.

Western countries levied several rounds of sanctions on both Moscow and Minsk in retaliation to the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, with Belarus accused of acting as a staging ground for Russia's incursion into northern Ukraine.

“The unprecedented political and sanction pressure from the so-called ‘collective West’ is pushing us to accelerate the unification processes,” Putin [said](#) in a video address to the annual Forum of Russian and Belarusian Regions.

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“After all, together it is easier to minimize the damage from illegal sanctions, it is easier to

master the production of products in demand, to develop new competencies, and to expand cooperation with friendly countries,” he continued.

Putin’s Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko is the only president of a former Soviet republic to openly back Russia’s so-called “special military operation” in Ukraine.

Also speaking at the forum, Lukashenko [said](#) that former Soviet republics should be interested in strengthening ties with Belarus and Russia “if, of course, they want to preserve their sovereignty and independence.”

Russia and Belarus are formally part of a “union state” that allows for broad economic and defense cooperation. Though talks to integrate further have been ongoing for years, Lukashenko has refused substantive political and economic unification proposals.

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