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Putin Slams 'Sanctions Fever' at Far East Forum

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Sergey Bobylev / TASS Photohost Agency

Updated with Putin comments.

Russian President Vladimir Putin slammed Western governments' "sanctions fever," defended the invasion of Ukraine and warned Europeans they could "freeze" without Russian energy exports at an economic forum in Russia's Far East on Wednesday.

"The [coronavirus] epidemic has been replaced by other global challenges that threaten the entire world," Putin told the Eastern Economic Forum in Russia's Pacific port city of Vladivostok.

"I'm referring to the West's sanctions fever," he said, criticizing "blatant and aggressive" attempts to "subjugate" countries that have not imposed economic restrictions on Russia.

Putin claimed that Western governments have fallen victim to their own sanctions imposed as punishment for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

And the Russian president also warned European countries that they could “freeze” if they tried to go without gas and oil supplies from Russia.

If European countries impose a price cap on purchases of Russian oil, Putin warned that Russia would simply halt supplies.

“There are contractual obligations and if there are any political decisions that contradict them, then we simply won’t fulfill them. We won’t supply anything at all if it contradicts our economic interests, in this case. We won’t supply gas, oil, coal or heating oil,” he said.

The president said countries that import Russian energy “are in no position to dictate their will.”

“Let them come to their senses,” he added.

When asked about gains and losses for Russia following the invasion pro-Western Ukraine in February, Putin appeared not to acknowledge military casualties or Russia’s economic downturn.

“I’m confident we haven’t lost anything and won’t lose anything [after invading Ukraine]. Our main gain is strengthening sovereignty,” Putin said.

Putin also claimed that most of the grain leaving Ukrainian ports after a Turkey-brokered deal to lift a Russian blockade was reaching the European Union instead of developing nations.

Putin said European countries "acted as colonialists in recent decades and centuries" and "they continue to act so today.”

Participation in the annual forum was part of Putin’s trip to Russia’s Far East, where he also oversaw large-scale Vostok-2022 war games involving China and other Russia-friendly countries Tuesday.

Putin also welcomed the departure of people who fled Russia in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine at the end of February.

“They’ve always worked against our country when they were here. Now, under the guise of being threatened by something here, they’re happy to move elsewhere and receive the same salary,” he said.

And, commenting on the recent 22-year prison sentence for ex-journalist Ivan Safronov on treason charges, Putin accused the reporter of sharing classified materials with Western intelligence.

“I’m in no position to judge the fairness of his sentence,” Putin said, adding that Safronov’s defense can appeal his conviction.

Putin was joined at the forum by China's top legislator Li Zhanshu, who ranks third in the Chinese government hierarchy, and Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, whose government is also facing diplomatic isolation.

Putin hailed the growing role of the Asia-Pacific region in global affairs as he seeks to shore up Russia's partnerships in Asia.

"Western countries are trying to preserve the former world order that's only profitable to them," Putin said, accusing the collective West of "regularly violating and changing its infamous rules."

"Other countries' unwillingness to submit to this diktat and lawlessness forces Western elites to snap and make short-sighted speculative decisions in global security, politics and the economy."

AFP contributed reporting.

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