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Kremlin Denies Putin Solicited War Contributions From Russian Billionaires

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Vladimir Putin speaks at the 35th Congress of Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. **kremlin.ru**

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Friday denied reports that President Vladimir Putin asked leading Russian businessmen to make large financial contributions to the state budget to help fund the war against Ukraine.

Instead, Peskov said, an unidentified businessman proposed the idea during a private gathering attended by Putin on Thursday, which took place alongside the annual congress of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, a pro-Kremlin business lobby.

In Peskov's words, the president supported what was described as a personal initiative, but he himself did not request that donations be made to the state.

"One of the participants said this. It was entirely his own initiative. It wasn't President Putin's initiative, although the head of state naturally welcomed it," he told reporters during a daily briefing.

Earlier, sources told the independent news outlet The Bell and The Financial Times that Putin had asked for "voluntary contributions" from the group of business leaders in a bid to stabilize Russia's finances as it comes under increasing strain from soaring military spending.

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Peskov also denied claims that Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin was the one to have proposed the idea.

"The truth is that one participant indeed stated he felt it necessary to provide the state with a certain large — a very large — sum of money, and it was his 'family decision'," he said.

Peskov added that the unidentified businessman argued that he and the "vast majority" of Russian businessmen who made their fortunes after the collapse of the Soviet Union viewed it as "their duty" to help the state.

But he dismissed claims that any of the financial contributions would be used to finance the war against Ukraine.

The Bell reported that billionaire Senator Suleiman Kerimov pledged 100 billion rubles ($1.2 billion), while the Financial Times said metals magnate Oleg Deripaska also agreed to give an unspecified amount.

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