



## Putin Annexes Crimea; Ukraine Denounces Move as “Robbery”

In a rousing and defiant speech to a joint session of Russia’s parliament on March 18, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Ukraine’s Crimea region and the Crimean port city of Sevastapol were being incorporated into Russia, as the result of a referendum vote in Crimea on March 16.

Putin’s hour-long address was interrupted repeatedly by loud applause and standing ovations, as he lashed out at what he described as hypocrisy by the United States, NATO, and the West, and appealed to Russian patriotism. “In our hearts we know Crimea has always been an inalienable part of Russia,” he said. Putin especially attacked the US/EU/NATO condemnations of the Crimean referendum, arguing that the Crimean vote for independence from Ukraine should be seen in the same light as Kosovo’s vote to secede from Serbia, which the West supported. Putin stated:



Our western partners created the Kosovo precedent with their own hands. In a situation absolutely the same as the one in Crimea they recognized Kosovo’s secession from Serbia legitimate while arguing that no permission from a country’s central authority for a unilateral declaration of independence is necessary...

That’s what they wrote, that what they trumpeted all over the world, coerced everyone into it — and now they are complaining. Why is that?

“It’s beyond double standards,” Putin said. “It’s a kind of baffling, primitive and blatant cynicism. One can’t just twist things to fit his interests, to call something white on one day and black on the next one.”

Following the address, Putin signed treaties of accession with newly installed Crimean Prime Minister Sergei Aksyonov, Crimean parliament speaker Vladimir Konstantionov (and Sevastapol Mayor Alexei Chaly). News reports from Moscow, Crimea, and other parts of Russia reported crowds celebrating ecstatically over the announced annexation. In Kiev, however, the new interim government denounced the action as “fascist” and a “robbery.”

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk called Russia’s annexation of Crimea “a robbery on an international scale.” Ukraine’s interim President Oleksandr Turchynov told reporters that Putin is “mimicking the fascists of the last century” by annexing Crimea. “The political leadership of Russia will have to answer before the whole world for crimes they are committing today in our country,” Turchynov said.



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on March 18, 2014

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The Crimean referendum, held on Sunday, March 16, took place under the armed “supervision” of masked gunmen that Ukraine says are Russian troops. Russia has denied that the soldiers are Russian, claiming they are pro-Russian Crimean “militia” men. On Monday, March 17, Mikhail Malyshev, head of the Crimean referendum commission, announced at a news conference that the final tally from the Sunday vote was 96.8 percent in favor of Crimea seceding from Ukraine. Crimea, which has a majority Russia-speaking population, was expected to go heavily in favor of secession, but 96.8 percent is a bit hard to believe, even for the most ardent Russophile. Even more astounding is Malyshev’s claim that not a single complaint about the vote was registered with the commission.

Valery Ryazantsev, who headed Russia’s observer mission in Crimea, said there are “absolutely no reasons to consider the vote results illegitimate,” the Russian Interfax news agency reported. But international observers were not allowed to monitor the election and the Ukrainian government has denounced it as a “circus” stage-managed by Moscow and conducted at gunpoint.

“Now, on the territory of the autonomous republic of Crimea under the stage direction of the Russian Federation, a circus performance is underway: the so-called referendum,” Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk told a government meeting on Sunday, as the referendum was underway. “Also taking part in the performance are 21,000 Russian troops, who with their guns are trying to prove the legality of the referendum.”

*Photo of Vladimir Putin: AP Images*

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