

## **Putin visits Crimea, drawing fierce criticism from Ukraine, U.S.**

### **Ukraine**

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**Analyst: "we are confident that Putin would rather expand his war against the West than withdraw from Crimea. In reality, he has no other choice considering that his entire legacy and credibility with the Russian public largely depends on his commitment to keeping Crimea under his control. Withdrawing from Crimea would mean surrendering his presidency." Photo: Putin addresses concert at Sevastopol to celebrate illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula of Ukraine.**

KYIV, Mar 15, 2018 - Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Crimea on March 14 ahead of presidential elections on Sunday, drawing fierce criticism from the Ukrainian and American governments, Concorde Capital informed clients in an online advisory today. In his public comments, Putin referred to the illegally organized March 2014 referendum to join Russia as "real democracy" that "restored historic justice." Putin visited the Kerch Strait bridge currently under construction, which will connect the peninsula with the Russian mainland. Ukraine has filed a complaint for UN arbitration claiming the bridge is already violating its maritime rights. He also visited the Simferopol airport currently being renovated. President Poroshenko referred to Putin's Crimea visit as "an extremely dangerous provocation" in comments to reporters the same day. He repeated his calls for the EU to impose further sanctions against the Russian government for organizing the illegal elections this weekend on Ukrainian territory. Demonstrating its support for Ukraine, the U.S. State Department repeated its condemnation of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and reaffirmed its support for Ukraine's territorial integrity. "In light of Putin's remarks, it is important to call attention to the illegitimacy of the staged "referendum," but also to the tremendous human costs the Russian government has imposed on the people of Crimea," said Heather Nauert, a U.S. State Department spokeswoman. Concorde analyst Zenon Zawada added: "It's intentionally symbolic that Putin has organized the presidential elections on March 18, the four-year anniversary of the illegally held referendum in which Crimeans voted to approve their annexation into the Russian Federation. He has made the Crimean annexation a central theme in his re-election campaign, playing on the Russian public's anti-Western sentiments, as well as national pride in reclaiming what they argue are historically Russian lands. "So Putin has made it clear to the world that he won't withdraw from Crimea, regardless of the sanctions that have been imposed. And many European players, who are increasingly anxious to restore trade relations with Russians, are growing more impatient with the EU establishment in keeping the sanctions imposed. The European public also isn't much concerned with the Crimean occupation, being far more preoccupied with domestic problems and increasingly supporting populist-nationalist parties that are sympathetic to Putin. "So while we expect the EU to tighten sanctions against Russia in relation to these elections, we see a bigger trend towards EU legislatures beginning to relax sanctions against Russia in the next two years. And we are confident that Putin would rather expand his war against the West than withdraw from Crimea. In reality, he has no other choice considering that his entire legacy and credibility with the Russian public largely depends on his commitment to keeping Crimea under his control. Withdrawing from Crimea would mean surrendering his

presidency.&rdquo;

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