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"Don't panic", Ukraine's Zelensky tells West amid fears of Russian invasion

"Не панікуйте", - каже Зеленський Заходу на тлі побоювань російського вторгнення

Президент України Володимир Зеленський закликав Захід зберігати спокій через напруженість у відносинах з Росією, незважаючи на підозри, що вона планує вторгнутися в його країну. "Найбільший ризик для України" - це "дестабілізація ситуації всередині країни", - заявив В. Зеленський. Президент США Джо Байден сказав В. Зеленському, що, за даними Білого дому, існує явна ймовірність того, що росіяни можуть вторгнутися в Україну в лютому. Президент Франції Еммануель Макрон більше години розмовляв з Володимиром Путіним, після чого Єлисейський палац повідомив, що обидва лідери погодилися з необхідністю розрядити кризу.

<https://www.euronews.com/2022/01/28/don-t-panic-ukraine-s-zelensky-tells-west-amid-fears-of-russian-invasion>

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has called on the West to remain calm over the tensions with Russia, in spite of the suspicions that it plans to invade his country.

"We don't need this panic" because "we need to stabilise the economy" of the former Soviet republic, the Ukrainian leader said during a news conference for foreign media on Friday afternoon.

He was speaking as diplomatic efforts continued to defuse the crisis brought by the build-up of Russian forces on Ukraine's borders. The temperature has been cranked up a notch since Wednesday when Washington and NATO both rejected Moscow's demands for security guarantees in Europe.

"The probability of the attack exists, it has not disappeared and it was not less serious in 2021," but "we do not see a higher escalation than the one which existed last year," Zelensky said.

The president chided international media and "even respected heads of state", who would have people believe that there was already a war all over the country, "that there are troops advancing on the roads. But that's not the case," he added.

"This panic, how much is it costing our country?" he asked.

"The biggest risk for Ukraine" is "the destabilisation of the situation inside the country," Zelensky argued, rather than Western fears of a Russian invasion of the former Soviet republic.

The message echoes others from the authorities in Kyiv this week, where people are used to living with the threat from Russia and are trying to live their lives as normally as possible.

Thousands of Ukrainians have expressed their resolve to stand up to Russian pressure under the hashtag #UkrainiansWillResist on Twitter and Facebook.

On Thursday US President Joe Biden told Zelensky that there was "a distinct possibility that the Russians could invade Ukraine in February", according to the White House.

As diplomatic efforts continued on Friday, the **message from Moscow** was that Russia was not looking for conflict, despite its troops build-up and the West's rejection of its demands.

However both President Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov complained that Russia's main concerns were not being addressed.

"There won't be a war as far as it depends on the Russian Federation, we don't want a war," **Lavrov said** in a live interview with Russian radio stations. "But we won't let our interests be rudely trampled on and ignored."

The US and NATO have refused Russia's call to ban Ukraine permanently from joining NATO and for the withdrawal of Western forces, saying that allied deployments of troops and military equipment in eastern Europe are non-negotiable.

French President Emmanuel Macron spoke with Vladimir Putin for more than an hour on Friday, the Elysée saying afterwards that both leaders had agreed on the need to defuse the crisis.

The Russian military held naval and artillery exercises on Friday amid continued high tensions. Warships from Russia's Black Sea fleet fired at floating and airborne targets, while artillery squads of the 150th division conducted remote target practice in the Rostov region.

Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko said on Friday that his country would **fight alongside Russia** in the event of conflict.

The West has warned that Russia will face "massive consequences" in the event of aggression against Ukraine, with Germany saying a package of sanctions being prepared includes the controversial Nord Stream 2 project -- the natural gas pipeline between Russia and Germany which is completed but not operational.