

Putin Building Church, Monasteries in the Kremlin

Russian President Vladimir Putin has called for two monasteries and a church that were demolished during Soviet times to be rebuilt in the Kremlin, the largest overhaul of the site's architectural landscape in nearly a century.

Putin has cultivated strong ties with Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, adopting more conservative policies and prompting some critics to suggest the line separating state and church has become blurred.

At a meeting on Thursday with Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin and top administrators of the Kremlin site, Putin said his plan would involve tearing down a building used for administrative purposes to restore the site's "historic appearance."

Putin gave no indication of the cost of construction. Russia's economy is teetering on the brink of recession and faces reduced access to foreign capital after the West imposed sanctions in retaliation for Moscow's policies in Ukraine.

The Kremlin, a fortified landmark sprawling across 69 acres in central Moscow and home to the president's office and his administration, has seen many attacks in its six-century history and has come to symbolize Russia's enduring power.

"Here is the idea ... to restore the historic appearance of the place with two monasteries and a church, but giving them, considering today's realities, an exclusively cultural character," the Kremlin's website quoted Putin as saying.

UNESCO World Heritage Site

Putin said the plan hinged on winning the support of the Russian public and UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural

agency. The Kremlin, built between the 14th and 17th centuries, is a listed UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The monasteries and the church were torn down in 1929-30, a time of religious persecution under the rule of Communist dictator Josef Stalin, to make space for the administrative building that has been undergoing refurbishment since 2011.

“I do not insist on anything, it’s an idea, a proposal,” said Putin, who enjoys popularity ratings of more than 80 percent since Russia annexed Ukraine’s Crimea. “If the public deems it appropriate then all needs to be worked out calmly.”

Putin also supported Sobyenin’s idea to open another gate to the Kremlin for tourists, the Spassky Gate, which is currently closed off.

“If there is an immediate access from Red Square to Spassky Gate, it will be of course, more comfortable for residents and tourists,” Sobyenin told Putin.

“Let’s do it,” Putin replied.

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