
PRO-RUSSIA CZECH PRESIDENT TO MEET WITH PUTIN IN SOCHI

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Czech President Milos Zeman has arrived in the Black Sea resort of Sochi for talks scheduled on November 21 with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Kremlin said.

The pro-Russia Czech leaders four-day trip will also include a visit to Moscow, where he will meet on November 22 with Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and address the Russian-Czech Business Forum.

He is also scheduled to hold a lunch with former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev on November 22.

Zemans position is mainly a ceremonial role, but his comments in the past expressing support for Russia and Putin have raised some concerns among the Czech government and Western allies.

He angered Kyiv when he questioned the effectiveness of Western-imposed sanctions against Russia for its aggression in Ukraine.

Zeman called Moscow's annexation of Ukraines Crimea region in 2014 a fait accompli and said that there should be dialogue over Russian compensation to Ukraine, possibly with gas, oil, or money.

He has also unsuccessfully called on the Czech government to hold a referendum on its membership in the European Union and NATO, although he has said he favors remaining in both organizations and just wants to give citizens a choice.

In 2016, he blasted the United States for its illegitimate involvement in Syrias civil war, while praising Russias antiterror campaign in the Middle East country.

Zeman, one of the few European leaders to endorse Donald Trump in the U.S. presidential campaign, also has stirred controversy with his rhetoric against Muslim immigrants and attacks on the media.

The journey to Russia will be one of Zemans final foreign trips of his first five-year presidential term, which will expire next spring. He is expected to seek reelection in the presidential election scheduled for January 2018.

A recent poll showed Zeman would receive 41.5 percent of the vote, ahead of scientist Jiri Drahos, with 30.5 percent.

Kaynak/Source: