

Answers to media questions

Vladimir Putin answered media questions following his state visit to Kazakhstan and the CSTO summit.

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President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Good evening. What is your question?

Question: Good evening, Mr President.

Olga Knyazeva, Channel One.

Your state visit to Kazakhstan is drawing to an end. You were welcomed everywhere at the top level. What is your take on the cooperation prospects?

Vladimir Putin: Alright. Kazakhstan, as you heard me say it many times, is more than our ally and reliable partner. Importantly, Kazakhstan is making great strides under the leadership of President Tokayev, and demonstrating stable and robust growth. The sociopolitical situation in the country is stable, which is crucial for planning work in the economic sphere and investing.

We have billions invested in the economy of Kazakhstan. I mentioned earlier that mutual trade amounts to nearly 30 billion and keeps growing. Our traditional areas of cooperation include space exploration, energy, and, now, advanced technologies. Energy projects may see expanded cooperation in nuclear energy, since we are already working on it as a team. Kazakhstan is the world's largest producer of uranium, and we have established our presence at uranium deposits in Kazakhstan. We have good prospects in the manufacturing sector, especially in the cooperation area.

Payments were and still are a problem, but we now have over 80 percent of payments made in national currencies, which, of course, makes our work in the financial sphere easier.

On top of everything else, we also maintain humanitarian ties, and enjoy very good people-to-people contacts. Kazakhstan is practically a Russian-speaking country, which you have probably had a chance to see for yourself. Unfortunately, there are always many people out there with their own opinions on how things should be done, and who criticise the ongoing processes in Russian and Kazakhstani societies. This position and this criticism are not always consistent with the national interests, including the interests of the Russian state. It is not always good for us. I believe we should do our best to strengthen our ties. By no means should we take steps that may destroy our relations.

For example, we enjoy traditional ties in the energy sector. Still, we may have major projects coming up in the sphere of transporting our energy to third countries across the territory of Kazakhstan. Here, we have a traditional situation where one region of Kazakhstan may experience natural gas shortages, while other regions may have excess supplies of it. Therefore, we find it makes more economic sense to join efforts and to supply something to Kazakhstan, to receive something from Kazakhstan, given the fairly large territories of Kazakhstan and Russia, than to develop it within our own borders. That makes us natural partners and allies.

My assessment is that we have very promising prospects. Yesterday, President Tokayev and I spend the entire evening discussing these prospects informally over dinner. To reiterate, I assess them as highly positive.

Question: Good afternoon. Alexei Golovko, Rossiya television channel.

You have mentioned uranium earlier. Still, Kazakhstan held a referendum this October, and the overwhelming majority of the voters were in favour of building a nuclear power plant. As far as we know, they have not decided on the contractor yet. Did you discuss this particular issue with Mr Tokayev? Perhaps, you have highlighted the advantages Rosatom has to offer? Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Yes, of course. We paid quite a lot of attention to it during the talks yesterday, both during the restricted-format and the expanded-format talks. If Kazakhstan decides to go ahead with its nuclear power projects, then, of course, as any customer, it can choose the most suitable technological solution and financial arrangements.

I think it is no coincidence that the Russian company Rosatom is the world's largest company of its kind, including in terms of the number of nuclear power plants it is building around the world. Why is that? It is because, as I have said many times, we are not just building power plants. As a rule, we create an industry in a country that initiates this type of activity. We train personnel, supply the necessary materials, take away spent fuel and so on. We help advance science in the nuclear sphere.

Of course, the President of Kazakhstan and our Kazakhstani colleagues and friends are familiar with this type of activity. They are not starting from scratch. To reiterate, we even have enterprises – they have uranium mining enterprises – which are operating in this area. They are well aware of what they want and what they are willing to pay for it, and what they want to get. That is why we are having a very professional dialogue. Should our partners, in this case, Kazakhstan, need or prefer to use some solutions, including technological solutions from third countries, and involve their specialists into the collaborative effort, this is also possible, and Rosatom has experiences of cooperating with foreign partners. We discussed this yesterday as well.

The customer always has the final say. But I think our cooperation with Kazakhstan in this area is quite possible. It would be really strange for Kazakhstan, which has the world's largest uranium deposits, not to use uranium, but only mine and export it. The leadership of Kazakhstan is operating on this premise

In addition to everything else, it is probably no coincidence that Rosatom is currently operating in 20 countries, I think, or building 20 facilities abroad. It owns advanced technologies and the world's best safety standards, which fact is confirmed by the International Atomic Energy Organisation, the IAEA.

Please go ahead.

Question: Nikita Korzun, NTV.

Mr President, how do you assess the current state of the CSTO, following today's summit? Is the organisation dead or alive? And what do you think of Armenia's "skipping" it?

Vladimir Putin: As for the CSTO as an organisation, it is definitely not only alive, but alive and progressing, with all countries that take an active part in its work willing to maintain these contacts now and in the future.

The global situation is complicated, and not only due to the developments unfolding at the Ukraine theatre. Are things just fine in Asia? Do developments on the Commonwealth border with Afghanistan give us a chance to relax and ignore anything?

Afghanistan is undergoing challenging processes. We hope that we will be able to build up relations with Afghanistan and we cannot fail to notice that the situation is becoming more stable there. We maintain relations with the current leadership of Afghanistan, and they will keep advancing. Recently, Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu visited Afghanistan and reported to me on the outcomes. However, the situation is still difficult and requires special care and attention from us, including through the CSTO.

The CSTO is engaged not only in military matters but also in fighting organised crime, drug trafficking, and other issues. This means the CSTO has much to attend to, and the member countries have a stake in it. This is the first point.

And now regarding Armenia. Each country is entitled to choose what and how it wants to do with regard to ensuring its security. I think today's situation between Armenia and the CSTO is most likely caused by internal political processes in Armenia. It is also linked with the aftermath of the Karabakh crisis, without doubt. But I would like to stress that the CSTO has nothing to do with it, you see? I repeatedly said about that. Everything that was happening in this respect had nothing to do with the CSTO because Armenia did not suffer from any external aggression.

The CSTO is designed to protect its member countries from external aggression. The Karabakh case is very special since Armenia had not recognised Karabakh's independence and definitely had not included it into its sovereign territory. Thus from the legal point of view, the events in Nagorny Karabakh were not directly connected with

Armenia. Therefore, claims that the CSTO should have fought on the territory of the enclave sound somewhat odd, don't they? Of course, they do.

Nevertheless, it is a very sensitive issue. It is always easy to judge from the outside. Things are always much more complicated inside. I repeat: I think that any country, a member of the organisation, should independently identify its national interests. And we will treat it with respect. That's my first point. And secondly, Armenia has not announced it has withdrawn. At least not yet. It has said that it is taking a pause, but at the same time it supports all the documents that are endorsed during our today's meeting, during today's session of negotiations, and draws our attention exactly to that. If this is true, it means that there is a possibility that Armenia will reinstall its full-fledged format within this organisation. We will see.

I reiterate: the final decision will be made by the country – member of the organisation.

Question: Alyona Nefyodova, Izvestia newspaper.

Mr President, during a recent narrow-format meeting, you mentioned that Moscow has responded to the ongoing usage of US missiles for attacks on Russian territory.

Vladimir Putin: Indeed, twice following the Oreshnik response. Subsequently, ATACMS were employed twice more in the Kursk Region. Although the damage is minimal, the mere fact of their usage, of course, cannot be overlooked, particularly as there has been some damage inflicted.

Question: Simultaneously, you underlined that Moscow is prepared to counter further escalation from the West.

Vladimir Putin: Precisely, and I not only emphasised this, but also stated that we took action last night.

Question: In light of this, my question pertains to the measures Russia is ready to implement. In your view, are there ongoing risks associated with the Western missiles being used against Russian territory?

Vladimir Putin: Well, that is a question for the West, whether they intend to persist with these actions. Are there risks involved in strikes on Russian territory? Undoubtedly, as I have reiterated on numerous occasions. These actions denote the direct involvement of Western nations in an armed conflict. How could it be perceived otherwise? If their experts are orchestrating flight plans, relaying intelligence to themselves, and coordinating strikes on targets within the Russian Federation, then of course, such risks exist.

I indicated that they received a response today. Our Armed Forces have been executing retaliatory strikes over the past couple of days. Today, there was a comprehensive operation: 90 missiles were deployed alongside 100 unmanned strike vehicles. Seventeen targets within Ukraine were struck, encompassing military, military-industrial, and auxiliary facilities that support the armed forces and industrial defence enterprises.

I wish to reiterate once more: we will certainly respond to such acts of aggression against the Russian Federation. The timing, methods, and weapons employed will be determined by the General Staff of the Ministry of Defence, as each target necessitates a specific approach and appropriate weaponry.

For instance, it would be futile to target a minor objective with a hypersonic missile, akin to “using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.” However, we will utilise our entire arsenal against significant targets. As I have previously mentioned, we do not rule out the combat employment of Oreshnik on military-industrial facilities or command centres, including those in Kiev. We remain cognisant that the Kiev authorities continue their attempts to target our critical assets, including those in St. Petersburg and Moscow.

Question: Good afternoon. Pavel Zarubin, Rossiya TV channel.

You have already provided extensive information about Oreshnik today, yet Western media assert that the warhead of the Oreshnik lacked explosives. If this is accurate, what implications does it have?

Could you share any additional details regarding Oreshnik? Furthermore, how many such classified developments do we generally possess, as you mentioned, “on the menu that will satisfy the client?” Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: You see, when I mentioned that we are conducting test launches, it indicates that this endeavour is focused, among other objectives, on enhancing these weapons. That is indeed the case.

Concerning strike capabilities, I have already addressed this. If we deploy multiple such systems simultaneously in a single strike – say, two, three, or four systems – it would be comparable in force to the use of nuclear weapons, albeit they are not nuclear. This is because they are: a) high-precision; b) not equipped with a nuclear explosive device, thus they do not cause environmental contamination. Yet, the force would be comparable.

Regarding the presence of explosives, I reiterate: this is why testing is conducted, to determine what requires further development. There is no great secret here; experts will readily grasp what I am referring to. When I speak of improvement, it primarily concerns the balance between range and warhead.

The greater the range, the smaller the warhead; conversely, the shorter the range, the more potent the warhead. The system is capable of lifting a greater payload in this scenario, that's the crux of it. For targets at varying distances, different missile types are required, or at least, distinct configurations of these missiles, specifically the warhead equipment. This is an area requiring attention. It is not a straightforward task, and it will likely necessitate additional research and development work, etc.

As for the missile we utilised, the appropriate elements were employed as the impact components, and they serve as damage agents as well. As I have mentioned, these are quite potent elements that are heated to a temperature of 4,000 degrees. If I am not mistaken, (you can check online), the surface of the Sun is approximately 5,600–6,000 degrees, making it comparable to solar surface temperatures.

A kinetic impact is a formidable force, akin to a meteorite impact. History has shown us the effects and consequences of meteorite impacts. They have been sufficient to create entire lakes, have they not? Consider the Tunguska event and its outcomes.

Similarly here, the damage is substantial: everything at the centre is reduced to ash, breaking down into its elemental components, and objects located at a depth of three or four, possibly even more, floors below are affected. These are fortified structures, not

merely floors. The impact force is immense. Of course, more can be added to amplify the effect. The key point is that the functional sample has been created, it functions as intended by its designers. It is a high-precision and high-power weapon.

Question: Are there other similar developments underway?

Vladimir Putin: I won't disclose everything to you.

We only revealed information about Oreshnik after it underwent testing. We waited until this test was completed and, to be candid, until we observed the outcome. Only then did we make an announcement. This is a situation where discretion is warranted.

Yes, please.

Question: Veronika Romanenkova, TASS news agency.

Western media outlets report that some US and European politicians and officials are already suggesting giving nuclear weapons back to Kiev. How real is this scenario, in your opinion? Or is it some sort of escalation and fear-mongering? Yet if this happens, if nuclear weapons are given to the Kiev regime, how will Russia respond? Could preventive measures be taken? Does Ukraine's non-nuclear status remain a precondition for settling the conflict?

Vladimir Putin: Being a sane person, what do you think we are going to do if the country we are fighting with becomes a nuclear power? In this case we will use all – and I want to stress it – all weapons Russia has, all of them. We will not let this happen. This is the first point.

Secondly, such statements can only be made by irresponsible individuals who are not accountable for anything and do not feel any burden of responsibility for the destiny of their countries and the entire world.

And thirdly, if someone transfers something officially, that will constitute a violation of all assumed commitments regarding non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

And we will not let this happen in Ukraine itself, we will be watching every step being taken there. It used to be a very high-tech and industrially developed republic of the Soviet Union. However, everything or nearly everything Soviet Ukraine could take pride in has been lost. Thus it will be next to impossible to do it from scratch. What could be done is something dirty, a dirty bomb by scrambling up nuclear power plants' waste. But even in this case the response will be absolutely adequate to the threats to the Russian Federation.

Question: Andrei Kolesnikov, Kommersant newspaper.

Mr President, when you spoke about possible strikes on decision-making centres, you did not specify whether you meant military or political centres. That's my first question.

And the second is, do you, as Commander-in-Chief, think those strikes will be made possible by the Oreshnik system since nothing else will reach the targets?

Vladimir Putin: You see, there was a joke during the Soviet times about weather forecasts: "Anything is possible throughout the day today."

Question: Good afternoon, Mr President.

Alexander Yunashev, Life.

The dollar and the euro have been breaking all records on the stock exchange. They have just rolled back a little, but prices are growing nonetheless, and the ruble has even weakened against the tenge by 80 kopecks overnight. The population, at least a high proportion of the population, is panicking.

Can you tell us how high the real inflation is? What is the real average salary in Russia, not the nominal one? When are we going to curb inflation, if at all?

Vladimir Putin: You want some hype, don't you?

Firstly, every figure aired by the Central Bank regarding inflation is real. They are not making stuff up. This is the first point.

Secondly, this can be easily verified. Real inflation is easily verified by independent centres, which assess the state of the Russian economy and its credit and finance. So, everything that the Central Bank says (what was the last one – 8.5?) is true. Certain experts believe that, with inflation at 8.5 percent, the key interest rate of 21 percent is too high, that it is overstated. However, you are saying that prices are rising, which means the issue of whether the key rate is overstated or not should take more consideration than that.

There are anti-inflationary tools that can be used without raising the key rate. Such tools do exist. I am referring to a range of the Central Bank's policies for regulating the banking sector, such as reserve requirements that banks have to meet before they can issue loans. Furthermore, the Central Bank and Government make decisions to increase or decrease lending to the population, including mortgages, social loans, and so on. They have other tools as well. In any case, the final decision is to be made by experts at the Central Bank, in accordance with the applicable laws. We will see this in the near future.

As for the fluctuations in the ruble exchange rate, they are not solely caused by inflation. The ruble's rate is also influenced by other factors such as tax periods and oil prices. There are many seasonal factors. Therefore, in general, I believe the situation is well in hand, and there is no reason whatsoever to panic, as you said. True, our country and its neighbours are dealing with complicated processes, but they are under scrutiny.

Next, please.

Question: Good evening, Mr President.

Yekaterina Lazareva, Ura.ru news agency.

You had a telephone conversation with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz not long ago. You have been out of contact for almost two years now. Did it surprise you that Chancellor

Scholz was the first Western leader to make contact with you? What are your impressions of this dialogue? Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Strange as it may seem, but we stay in communication with many countries with which we have very strained relations. Indeed, I did not have direct contacts with the leaders of these countries. But I am aware that some of them are also willing to resume contacts with us, and to discuss the ongoing developments in Ukraine bilaterally and in the pan-European context.

Indeed, the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr Scholz, was the first to break the silence. There was nothing surprising for me here. We have been receiving signals about the Chancellor willing to talk on the phone for quite some time now. As you may be aware, we remain open to such contacts. We, including me, have never turned down such contacts and will never turn them down in the future. If anyone is willing to talk, they are welcome to do so. We are open to contacts.

The conversation with the Chancellor lasted quite a long time, a whole hour, and, of course, focused on the events in Ukraine. There was nothing unusual about it, I think, either for him, or for me. He laid out his position, I laid out mine, and each of us has remained of the same mind on this matter.

A few questions were related to bilateral relations. Well, more in passing, perhaps. Generally speaking, I think a dialogue is possible in the future.

Question: Olga Matveyeva, Mayak radio station, Vesti.FM. A large family from Naberezhnye Chelny is willing to name their child after the Oreshnik missile system. The head of the family, Vladimir Sukhov, said his wife was four months pregnant. They are expecting a baby girl and want to name her Oreshnitsa.

Have you heard about it? If they go ahead and name her that, would you be willing to meet with them?

Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: You know, this is a family matter. Let them run it by their grandmothers and grandfathers. It will probably make more sense than asking me. I am doing my own things. They have such a big event coming their way. I wish the future mom and the whole family all the best.

With regard to choosing a name for the baby, this is a family matter, and I will not even comment on it. I wish them all the best, happiness and good health.

Question: Good afternoon, Konstantin Kokoveshnikov, Zvezda TV channel.

Recently, in many of Russia's neighbouring countries, elections at various levels have either already taken place or are scheduled to occur in the near future. We can recall the aforementioned Georgia, as well as Abkhazia, Romania, and Moldova. Concurrently, the electoral process in many of these nations is frequently accompanied by mass protests. Politicians advocating closer ties with the West often accuse their opponents of seeking to deviate from the chosen democratic path, abandoning democratic values, and allege Russian interference in these elections.

From your perspective, do you perceive indications, conversely, of Western interference in the electoral processes of such countries? Do you foresee the threat of new "orange revolutions?" Moreover, how do you personally interpret the sentiments of an apparently substantial segment of the electorate in these countries, who seem inclined to restore severed relations with Russia?

Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: First and foremost, I want to assure you, and you can trust me that this is the truth, or very close to the truth. Despite the numerous interactions with countries of the former Soviet Union, including, for instance, Georgia, where there is likely mutual influence from Russia to Georgia and vice versa, at the official level, we do not meddle in domestic political processes. We do not intervene at all; we do not engage with it, we simply refrain from involvement.

Regarding Western interference, I cannot make the same statement about our Western "colleagues," if you will. Why? Because if we examine the number of participants from

various non-governmental organisations funded by foreign governments, as well as the number of individuals who attend protest rallies – considering their family members, friends, and so forth – we obtain a very realistic depiction of the crowds on the street and the number of individuals receiving funds from foreign governments for political activities within these countries. Just look at it objectively – this is semi-open information – and everything becomes immediately clear. He who pays the piper calls the tune, and indeed, they play it in the squares. Hence, there is interference.

When the events in Georgia unfolded, I must admit, I was taken aback watching and observing all this. I am surprised. We have no relations with them, with the present leadership of Georgia, none whatsoever. Yet, I was quite astonished by their bravery and the character they displayed in defending their viewpoint. I won't even make assessments of this viewpoint at the moment. To a large extent, similar processes are occurring in the other countries you mentioned. If you find this response satisfactory, there is nothing further to add.

Question: Hassan Nassr, RT Arabic.

Mr President, you said several times that you were ready for talks regarding Ukraine and named preconditions for such talks to start. After the Oreshnik missile system has showcased its might, will you change your preconditions?

Vladimir Putin: You might have failed to put it accurately. I didn't lay out any preconditions. I did not say that the preconditions to launch talks are the following. I just spoke about our terms of peace settlement.

In my view, conditions for a lasting and stable peace are such, such and such, and they were presented in detail in my speech at the meeting with the Russian Foreign Ministry leadership in June of this year. I have nothing else to add.

We have enough weapons, although I understand, and we are all aware that the emergence of such a weapon as the Oreshnik missile system strengthens Russia's military positions because this is obviously a non-nuclear weapon but the results of its impact and its power, as I have already mentioned, are equal to those of nuclear weapons, especially if several systems are used to deliver a strike. It matters, doesn't it? This is true.

However, our stance regarding the Ukraine settlement does not change after the emergence of more and more new weapon systems. We are still ready for: a) a negotiation process, and b) of course, on the terms I presented in my address to the Foreign Ministry leadership in Moscow last June. Nothing has changed.

Go ahead, please.

Question: Gleb Ivanov, Argumenty i Fakty newspaper.

We have been talking much lately about high-precision Western weapons and the Oreshnik system. But there is another kind of weapons that has been widely used during the special military operation – drones. Western media have written lately that their countries will give the Armed Forces of Ukraine new chips that will allow Ukrainian drones to bypass Russian electronic warfare (EW) systems. How serious is this threat? Are the reports true? And how will we respond to this?

And the second question. We know that Ukrainian drone operators have been designated as a separate service branch. Should we follow suit?

Vladimir Putin: As to some new chips and other equipment for operating drones, it is possible. Drones have been used by both parties very intensively. The Armed Forces of Ukraine are also using them intensively. We use more drones but the other party also has a lot of them. We were the first to start using fiber-optic ground-controlled drones, and later they also began doing it. Such drones are absolutely immune to EW. Therefore, new chips will appear, it is quite possible. I am sure we will give a prompt response. Information exchange is very rapid as is, unfortunately, reciprocal acquisition of it, followed by instantly using it. Those who respond quicker will win.

Our service personnel, our men have learnt to respond with a lightning speed, and on site at that. We have very many well-educated people joining the combat zone. To be honest, when I read or listen to incoming reports, I get surprised that very well-educated people with very good engineering training are working wonders in the combat area while risking their lives. Drones are currently one of the crucial factors for successful combat activities, though. Can they transfer new chips [to Ukraine]? They can.

I mentioned this during the CSTO restricted-format meeting today. Will this make a difference on the battlefield? No, it will not. The Russian army is advancing steadily across most of the line of contact, and I think it will continue to do so. We will work gradually to take more ground, as we are doing now, thanks to our courageous troops. I never tire of saying this, but this is the way things are. Your colleagues from the combat zone, war correspondents, speak about it very convincingly. This is how things are. No one is making anything up.

Question: With regard to a separate branch of the armed forces.

Vladimir Putin: Yes, I know they have done it there, but we are also thinking about it. Organising this work is a separate issue and an important one. I agree with you. The specific outcome depends on the way a particular type of activity is organised. People in the General Staff and the Defence Ministry are thinking about it as well. Our Defence Minister is well-versed in these matters, even though he is a trained economist. Still, he dealt with unmanned aerial vehicles when he served as First Deputy Prime Minister. So, he is in the loop, and is pondering ways to organise this work in conjunction with the professional military. This is a truly important matter, I agree.

Question: Good afternoon, Interfax Agency.

I have an energy-related question. During the state visit to Kazakhstan, did you discuss ramping up the volume of petroleum, particularly Kazakhstani petroleum that is pumped through Russia to Germany? If so, what volumes are we talking about? If you can say it out loud, of course.

My second question is about pumping petroleum, but this time Russian petroleum, through the territory of Kazakhstan to China.

These are my two questions.

Vladimir Putin: We discussed all of that. We also discussed increasing the volumes of Kazakhstani petroleum pumped through the CPC [Caspian Pipeline Consortium] to the port of Novorossiysk and further shipment of Kazakhstani petroleum to the international markets. However, this petroleum is not owned by Kazakhstan

exclusively. Many foreign companies are involved in the production, so, one can say, it is indeed the territory of Kazakhstan, but this product is of international nature. This is my first point.

My second point is that we have repeatedly discussed the possibility of Rosneft selling its stake in the Schwedt refinery in Germany which will enable Kazakhstan to supply petroleum to this German refinery itself. You know, everything is possible.

The only thing that we find unacceptable is the use of unlawful methods against the Russian company Rosneft by the government of the Federal Republic, which are reminiscent of nationalisation, seizure of our property, banning us from management, and so on. But this is also a matter of negotiations, and Rosneft is prepared to hold these negotiations with the German regulators and their partners, or with any other partner for that matter, including partners from Kazakhstan.

We have discussed the possibility of creating new routes for pumping our products – petroleum and gas alike – to third countries, primarily the People’s Republic of China, through the territory of Kazakhstan among other optional routes. These are very lucrative, exciting, and promising routes and projects. Without a doubt, they will help stabilise the global economy, primarily, in the Asia-Pacific region, and we will thus gain an extra opportunity to engage in market operations.

Question: Yegor Piskunov, RT Channel.

You have mentioned Chancellor Scholz, and I have a question regarding another chancellor. Chancellor Merkel has recently released her memoirs, wherein she dedicates a considerable portion to your relationship and recounts an incident from 2007 when she travelled to Sochi to visit you and encountered your dog, Konni.

Vladimir Putin: She encountered the dog?

Question: Indeed, she did meet your dog, yes. Many of us remember that dog.

Vladimir Putin: “The police with the dog promised to come...” No. “The dog and the police promised to come.” Yes? Alright, apologies, I’m kidding.

Question: Many of us recall the dog. She was exceedingly amiable; numerous people even petted her, and she enjoyed roaming freely. Apparently, a similar situation occurred. In essence, it transpired that Angela Merkel has a fear of dogs, and she wrote that you supposedly exploited her fear intentionally. Did such an event happen? Is it accurate?

And, if I may, a philosophical tangent. What transpired overall, how did it occur that there was a period when the German Chancellor visited you, and you frequently conversed in German there? And now, we discuss the prospect of deploying the same Oreshniks in that direction.

Thank you very much.

Vladimir Putin: Firstly, concerning the matter of the dog. Indeed, such an incident did occur. Ms Merkel visited us, and my dog, Konni, appeared. In all frankness, I already told Ms Merkel that I was unaware of her fear of dogs. Had I known, I would never have allowed it. Quite the opposite, I aimed to foster a relaxed, congenial atmosphere. I operated under the assumption that in Europe, and particularly in Germany, as I am aware from nearly five years of residing there, pets are regarded positively. On the contrary, I thought it would be pleasant for her. I learned later of her fear of dogs. Such things happen. As far as I recall, she mentioned being bitten by a dog in her childhood. Well, these things happen, psychological trauma. Upon learning of this, I apologised to her. I said, “Angela, I am sorry, I was unaware of this.” She, with a tenacity deserving of a better cause, you see, included it in her book. Honestly, it is peculiar to me, unexpected.

You and I are conversing, and this will be in the media. I am addressing her once more and saying: “Angela, please accept my apologies. I did not wish to cause you any distress. Quite the reverse, I intended to create a positive atmosphere for our dialogue. I apologise. Should you ever visit again – although I acknowledge the unlikelihood of it today – I assure you, I would not repeat it under any circumstances.”

And if we turn to serious matters, concerning the development of our relations with Europe and the Western countries in general, you know, looking at it in retrospect, I think that, in fact, we have gone to great lengths. I was not involved in it, but the generation of previous leaders went as far as the dissolution of the Soviet Union, including, as it seems to me, in order to make Russia part of this so-called civilised West, believing that

now, when the walls of ideological confrontation crumbled down, we will be part of the civilised world.

Nothing of the kind has happened. It turned out that in addition to all this, in addition to everything related to ideology, there are issues of a geopolitical nature, geopolitical interests, and they showed us immediately where our place was – somewhere there, in a corner, in a nook. But it wasn't the end of it. They began supporting separatist forces, terrorist forces in the Caucasus, they began rocking Russia from within with what their might. We coped with it, we went through this all. We offered whatever we could to try and build relations [with Western countries]. I have already talked about it many times, now I don't want to waste time on it and go over it again. That's it. If no – then no. NATO's expansion to the east: five waves, or six already. All our objections, all our concerns were simply ignored. They went stubbornly their own way. That's the way it is. This is how our relations developed, including with Europe.

Yes, I know, some European leaders say to me: "We were against it." I have already mentioned it, and I will repeat it again because this is important. "We were against Ukraine joining NATO. Well, you know we are against it, and we will vote against it". To my question: "So why did you open the door to NATO for Ukraine in Bucharest in 2008?" The answer was simple: "Well, the Americans pressed us hard then." Here is a nice how-d'ye-do! And what if they press harder tomorrow again? Will you agree on everything and finally sign the paper to the effect that Ukraine is a member of NATO?

That said, the US position did not change by that time. The United States told us: "Well, yes, we won't admit Ukraine now." Do you know why they did not want to admit it then? Because Ukraine was not ready, it had to go through certain stages of preparation for membership. "We won't do it now." And when it is prepared – they will admit it. And they will press hard on the Europeans again. And the Europeans will consent to it again. Look at what's happening now – well, it's happening in full view of the whole world.

I believe Europe has been debased big time. It ceased to exist as an independent centre, an independent political and sovereign centre of international politics. It will not think twice before dancing the polka to the tune played by the US administration, even if it hurts its own interests. Occasionally, I get the impression that high-ranking officials, in Germany or elsewhere in Europe, are on a mission from the US secret service. The problem is they

do not have the best interests of their own, in this case, German, people, in mind. How can one even agree with everything that is going on there?

Energy prices in some US states are three to five times lower than in Europe, in Germany, in particular. Entire enterprises and industries are closing down in Germany and moving to the United States. The Americans are doing so purposefully. They are pragmatic people, and may be doing the right thing for themselves. But what about the Europeans? One cannot get away from picturing them asking just one question when they are told they would be hung by the neck tomorrow. Their only question would be, "Shall we bring our own rope, or you will provide us with one?" Do you see what I mean? That is all there is to it.

Volkswagen is closing, metallurgical plants are closing, chemical plants are closing, as are glass plants. People are being sacked by the hundreds or even thousands. And nothing happens. All we hear is dead silence except some unintelligible ruckus in the ongoing internal political process. How can one even talk to such partners? What is there to negotiate?

It is not our fault that our relations with Europe have declined to such a low level. This is also the result of the internal state of the European establishment and European politics.

Still I hope this will go away at some point, and we will restore our relations with individual European countries and, more broadly, with the EU. Russia and our European partners have a stake in this. Perhaps, they are interested in that even more than we are. I think this natural interest in expanding relations with Russia in the interest, pardon me the tautology, of their own countries and peoples will prevail. I hope so. We will see how things turn out eventually in real life.

Let us take the definitively concluding question this time.

Please go ahead.

Question: Good afternoon. RIA Novosti.

If I may, I would like to revisit the matter concerning the CSTO.

According to the Collective Security Treaty, should there be military aggression against any member state, the other members of the Organisation are obliged, upon request, to promptly extend necessary assistance.

Does Russia intend to seek such support from the CSTO in light of the long-range strikes by Western weaponry on its soil? Was this topic discussed or mentioned in any capacity today? Furthermore, are the CSTO members prepared to render such assistance?

Vladimir Putin: You know, regarding the provision that mandates any CSTO member country to assist another state subjected to aggression, no one harbours any doubts about this. Indeed, each nation stands ready to act in accordance with its obligations.

However, let us examine the situation pragmatically. Considering that American weapons, such as the ATACMS, are targeting Russian territory, what realistically can the other countries of this organisation do to assist the Russian Federation? I mean, it is not a realistic expectation. Yet, even under these circumstances, we are likely capable of offering them as much support as we possibly can. We possess adequate resources and a safety margin to aid our allies if required.

Question: Vladimir Kulagin, Vedomosti.

To what degree should and could the current escalation, initiated by the Biden administration's approval for ATACMS strikes on Russia, influence the potential for establishing connections with the forthcoming Trump administration? How significant will this factor be in shaping relationships? Or are there perhaps other indicators that complicate this endeavour?

Vladimir Putin: We are unaware of the discussions between Mr Trump and the incumbent President during their meeting. We simply do not know, and therefore, we shall refrain from commenting on it – it is not feasible.

There are various scenarios. If incumbent President Biden believes that by escalating tensions, by intensifying the confrontation, he is paving the way for the future administration to extricate itself from this predicament, allowing the President-elect

to say: “It’s not me, it’s others who have lost their senses. I have no part in this. Let’s engage in dialogue.” Certainly, that remains a possibility.

Another plausible scenario is that the current administration seeks to create additional challenges for the future administration. That too is conceivable. However, from my perspective, the newly elected president is both intelligent and experienced, and I believe he will discover a solution, especially after enduring such, shall we say, a significant challenge as the battle to reclaim the White House.

You know, what struck me most, and I think you share my view, was not the fact that entirely uncivilised means were employed against Trump, absolutely uncivilised, including attempts on his life, more than once (incidentally, I believe he is still not entirely safe). So what? There have been various instances in the history of the United States. I believe he is a wise and hopefully judicious individual who comprehends all this. But what astonished me more was that during the attacks on him, during the struggle against him, not only was he subjected to degrading, unfounded procedures, legal charges, and so on, but his family members and children were targeted.

Our gangsters do not engage in such behaviour. When criminal groups clash among themselves, they do not involve women and children; they leave them be, men fight among themselves. But these individuals did involve them, can you believe it? It is so repugnant that it underscores once more the complete disarray of today’s American political system.

Nevertheless, the country remains great, unquestionably. We are open to dialogue with the United States, including with the future administration.

Thank you very much. Have a pleasant day. Goodbye.

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