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Editor of Ekho Moskvy Dressed Down by Putin

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has accused opposition radio station Ekho Moskvy of insulting him and serving the interests of foreign powers in a public dressing-down of the channel's editor-in-chief.

The attack suggests that Putin, all but certain to return as president after a vote in March despite streets protests against his 12-year rule, has grown impatient with media criticism and could move to curb opposition outlets.

"I see that you are upset with me. I see it in your face. Why? I am not getting upset with you when you are pouring diarrhea all over me from dawn to dusk," Putin told station boss Alexei Venediktov at a meeting with editors at the prime minister's residence.

Putin said he had heard a radio show about U.S. missile defense plans while on holiday in the Black Sea resort town of Sochi that was "serving the interests of another country at the expense of the Russian Federation."

"I was lying in bed thinking: 'This is not information. It is serving the interests of one country at the expense of another," Putin said.

The comments came after Venediktov asked Putin whether he was ready to meet some of the leaders of the protest movement, such as novelist Boris Akunin and satirist Dmitry Bykov.

Akunin and Bykov are among the group of cultural figures who created The League of Voters, which aims to battle election fraud in March's presidential poll.

"Everybody needs a fair vote," Venediktov told Putin. "Why don't you meet them despite the fact that maybe not everyone there loves you?"

Putin said he was ready for dialogue, but that opposition leaders had snubbed his overtures. "We have invited them several times, but they never came," he said.

Putin, who published an article this week outlining his achievements in office, said he was particularly infuriated by a remark in a blog on Ekho Moskvy, which said "only cattle vote for Putin."

"What kind of discussion is this then? What kind of attitude toward the majority of our population?" Putin fumed.

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