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Putin Jokes About Orgy, But Slams Pussy Riot

By Alexander Bratersky

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Putin speaking during his interview with TV channel RT.

In his first interview since his May inauguration, President Vladimir Putin joked about Pussy Riot's racy name and one member's scandalous 2008 orgy with art group Voina.

But he also condemned the band's church performances as "witches' sabbaths," yet denied any involvement in the case.

In reference to the orgy, which featured then-Voina member Nadezhda Tolokonnikova at a Moscow biological museum, Putin joked: "Many enthusiasts say group sex is better than one-on-one because, like in any group project, you can slack off."

The orgy, titled "[Expletive] for the Heir Puppy Bear!," was videotaped and dedicated to the 2008 presidential election. The surname of 5-foot, 2-inch-tall Dmitry Medvedev, who became president that year, means "of the bears."

"They had group sex in a public place. This, as they say, is their own business, people have the right to do what they want as long as it doesn't break the law," Putin told the state-run RT television channel. "But in a public place, it seems that already then, the authorities should have paid attention to this."

When asked to comment about Pussy Riot's controversial performance at Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral, Putin replied: "What they did in the cathedral, they first did at Yelokhovsky Cathedral: They came and had a witches' sabbath, then they went to another cathedral and had another one there."

He added, "In our country there is a very heavy memory of the beginning of Soviet times, when a large number of clergymen suffered."

Putin also asked the British interviewer to translate the name "Pussy Riot" into Russian, only to later admit that he already knew what it meant.

Three Pussy Riot members were recently sentenced to two years in prison for the Christ the Savior Cathedral performance in which they called for the Virgin Mary to "cast Putin out." They have appealed the verdict.

When asked about the verdict, Putin said: "A higher court is empowered to make any decision. To be honest, I have tried to stay as far away from the case as possible."

The band's appeal is currently under consideration by the Moscow City Court, Tolokonnikova's lawyer, Mark Feigin, told The Moscow Times on Thursday.

Feigin said he felt Putin's comments about the band were a signal to the court to be "tough" with them.

"Putin said he is not interested in the case, but his interview shows otherwise. He presents himself as a person who knows a lot of the details, even those unrelated to the case," Feigin said.

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