

Putin Says Romney Stance Shows Russia Is Right

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SOCHI, Krasnodar Region — U.S. presidential candidate Mitt Romney's critical stance on Russia proves that Moscow's opposition to an American anti-missile shield in Europe is sound policy, President Vladimir Putin said.

In his second public remarks about the Republican nominee in a week, Putin said there were "pluses and minuses" to Romney's attitude toward Russia.

"The fact that Mr. Romney considers us enemy No. 1 and clearly has a poor opinion of us is a minus. But the fact that he speaks that way — directly, frankly and clearly — means that he is a direct and candid person. That's a plus," he said.

"We'll focus on the pluses, not the minuses," he told reporters Tuesday in the Black Sea resort of Sochi.

Romney once called Russia "without question our No. 1 geopolitical foe" and has promised "less flexibility and more backbone" in policy on Russia if he defeats President Barack Obama

in the Nov. 6 election.

Last week, Putin said that Romney's criticism was in large part electioneering but that his apparent animosity meant Russia's suspicions about a missile shield the United States is building in Europe would only deepen if he is elected.

U.S. plans for a missile defense shield in Europe, which Washington has already started to deploy, have been a major irritant in U.S.-Russia relations.

Washington says the shield is meant to counter a potential threat from Iran and will pose no risk to Russia.

Russia says the system's interceptors will be able to destroy Russian warheads in flight by about 2018, weakening its nuclear arsenal and upsetting the balance of power. Moscow wants a binding guarantee the system would never be used against it.

Putin elaborated on the idea this week, saying he was "grateful" to Romney because his description of Russia as a foe "has once again confirmed our approach to the issue of missile defense is the right one."

"He has strengthened our negotiating position on this sensitive and very important issue," Putin said.

Russian officials have said that while the Obama administration's assurances that the shield is not meant to weaken Russia may be honest, a future president could have different intentions.

"The main thing for us is that even if Romney does not win this election, in four years he or somebody with similar views may come to power," Putin said. "And we must take that into account when we consider how to provide for the security of the Russian Federation well into the future."

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