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Radio Svoboda Deletes Interview Accusing Putin of Graft

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Freidson claimed that after Putin wrote the sum of $10,000 on a piece of paper during one of their meetings.

Radio Svoboda removed from its website an interview citing a former St. Petersburg businessman as claiming that in the 1990s he bribed President Vladimir Putin, who at that time was serving as deputy mayor of St. Petersburg.

"The publication was removed upon a request by Radio Svoboda's interviewee [Maxim Freidson], who is concerned about his safety," said a message published in place of the interview on Sunday. Freidson currently lives in Israel.

In the interview, published on Saturday, Freidson claimed that he had worked with Putin in the 1990s in St. Petersburg on the establishment of a joint Russian-American venture to manufacture police and hunting weapons.

Freidson claimed that after Putin wrote the sum of $10,000 on a piece of paper during one of their meetings, he paid the funds to then-Putin aide Alexei Miller, who currently serves as

the head of Gazprom, the state-owned gas giant. In 1991-96 he worked with Putin in the St. Petersburg administration.

Radio Svoboda is the Russian branch of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and is owned and financed by the U.S. government.

On Friday, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the TASS news agency that the Kremlin has been targeted recently by a foreign media offensive, complaining of active efforts to discredit the president.

In particular, the Kremlin received a list of questions from two "respected media outlets" from Britain and the United States in which they inquired about Putin's alleged involvement in corruption in 1990s, he said.

In his comments to TASS, Peskov has called the requests "attacks that are purposeful, quite crude and lacking in refined creativeness."

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