

German Chancellor Pressures Putin to Defend Chechen Gays and Jehovah's Witnesses

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Kremlin Press Service

Chancellor Angela Merkel held a joint press conference with Vladimir Putin today in Sochi, where the German leader asked Putin to use his influence to protect the rights of gays in Chechnya, where independent journalists say local security forces have detained and tortured more than 100 gay men. Merkel also raised concerns about Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and the Russian Supreme Court's recent decision to outlaw the religious group.

Putin did not respond to Merkel's comments about gays or Jehovah's Witnesses. The Kremlin has stood by Chechen state officials, who deny the very existence of gays in Chechnya.

Related article: [Detained, Tortured, Killed: How Chechnya Cracked Down on Gays](#)

Merkel and Putin met primarily to discuss the situations in Ukraine and Syria, where

ceasefires have repeatedly broken down.

The Russian and German governments disagree on many issues in both these conflicts, notably on the culprits of a recent sarin gas attack against Syrian civilians, the collapse of the Yanukovich presidency, the war in eastern Ukraine, and the annexation of Crimea.

Asked again about Russia's alleged interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Putin told reporters, "We never interfere in other countries' politics and we want no one to meddle in ours," warning that Western NGOs have "unfortunately" violated Russia's sovereignty "for years" by attempting to influence Russia's political process.

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