

Putin's End-of-Year Conference, the Highlights

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Kremlin Press Service

Russian President Vladimir Putin held his annual press conference on Thursday, fielding questions on domestic and foreign policy from state media and independent journalists.

There were questions about local tax rules, the environment and pensions. But Putin also spoke about foreign policy issues, including Ukraine, U.S. President Donald Trump and Russia's involvement in Syria.

We now know that the president is planning to run as an independent candidate in next year's elections, rather than for the ruling United Russia party.

He also compared opposition politician Alexei Navalny to former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and said that Olympic whistleblower Grigory Rodchenkov was working for U.S. intelligence agencies.

In all, the press conference lasted 3 hours and 42 minutes — which is slightly shorter than

last year. Here are the highlights:

On U.S. President Donald Trump:

“Look at the markets, how they’ve risen. That shows investors’ confidence in the American economy, it shows they believe in what President Trump is doing.”

“With all respect to his critics, this is an objective fact.”

Related article: [Live Blog: President Putin's 2017 End-of-Year Press Conference](#)

“With Trump, we address each other by name, so I do not know. If there were a formal and an informal ‘you’, would we switch to the informal? Most likely, yes.”

On Russian electoral meddling:

"This has all been made up by Trump's opponents to delegitimize him [...] It shows that these people have no respect for the people who voted for Trump.”

"Our [former] ambassador [Sergei Kislyak] is being accused of having contacts [with the Trump campaign]. Is that banned? Why all the spy mania?"

On the Olympic ban on Russian athletes:

“We gave cause to take action, but there is clearly a political context.”

“We hope for a constructive relationship with the International Olympic Committee and the World Anti-Doping Agency.”

On doping whistleblower Grigory Rodchenkov:

"You can't work together with people who've attempted suicide [...] It's a minus that Rodchenkov works with the FBI.”

Related article: [Doping Whistleblower Works for U.S. Intelligence, Says Putin](#)

“What substances do they give him to make him say what he says?”

On North Korea:

"The [U.S.] has put Russia in the same box as Iran and North Korea, and at the same time wants Russia to solve the problem of North Korea.”

“It is provoking North Korea [...] North Korea doesn’t see a solution other than to develop weapons of mass destruction. Both sides need to stop escalating this situation.”

“The U.S. has already used nuclear weapons once and it was unjustified then too.”

On Ukraine and Saakashvili

“The Ukrainian government has no desire whatsoever for a peace process [...] It is up to authorities in Kiev to reach an agreement with Donbass.”

“What Mikheil Saakashvili is doing is spitting in the face of the Georgian people, and of the Ukrainian people. How can you stand it? My heart is bleeding, it’s so sad to see.”

On Navalny and the lack of any real opposition candidates:

“There can be political competition, [but] this is about radicalism.”

“We don’t want Russia to become a version of Ukraine. We don’t want that [...] I’m sure the majority of Russians don’t want that and won’t allow it.”

On Igor Sechin’s failure to appear in court to be questioned on Alexei Ulyukayev:

“It’s not against the law [...] But he could’ve just gone, it’s not a big deal.”

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