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The Best Quotes From Putin's Interview to Austrian TV

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On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin gave an interview to Austrian broadcaster ORF, ahead of his trip to meet government and business leaders in Vienna.

Putin, who rarely speaks to Western media, was hit with a series of pointed questions from news presenter Armin Wolf on Russia's "troll factory," allegations of electoral meddling and, last but not least, his tendency to take his shirt off in public.

Here are the highlights:

Democracy

"There is no doubt that democracy has taken root in Russia. It is in our interests that the country follows a democratic path of development and it will."

Foreign affairs

“It is not our aim to divide anything or anybody in Europe. On the contrary, we want to see a united and prosperous European Union, because the European Union is our biggest trade and economic partner.”

On alleged election interference by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a restaurateur close to Putin, the alleged brain behind the pro-Kremlin 'troll factory'

“Could it be that the media and political standards of Western countries have fallen to such low levels that a Russian restaurant owner can sway voters in a European country or the United States? Isn’t that ridiculous?”

"Do you really think that a person who is in the restaurant business, even if this person has some hacking capabilities... could use them to sway elections in the United States or a European country?”

About Putin’s shirtless photo-ops

“You said ‘half-naked’ not ‘naked,’ thank God. When I am on vacation I see no need to hide behind the bushes, and there is nothing wrong with that.”

On opposition leader Alexei Navalny (and the Kremlin's refusal to utter his name)

“Voters can scope out anyone, because the internet is open and free. Nobody blocked him. Our mass media is free. People are free to speak out and make a name for themselves as representatives of many political movements do.”

“If a person gains stature in the eyes of voters, he or she becomes a figure for the country’s leaders to engage in a dialogue with. But if a political organization has the trust of one, two, three percent of people or just hundredths of a percent, then what is there to talk about? Then we get a Mikheil Saakashvili. And we do not need clowns.”

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