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Russian Pranksters Trick Newly Re-Elected Polish President

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Polish President Andrzej Duda was re-elected to a second term this week. **Lukasz Gagulsky / EPA / TASS**

A pair of notorious Russian pranksters known for posing as foreign officials in prank calls with European politicians have hoodwinked Poland's newly re-elected president this week.

Vladimir Kuznetsov, one half of the duo known as Vovan and Lexus, poses as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in the English-language call, where he congratulates Polish President Andrzej Duda on eking out a second presidential term.

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The 11-minute conversation ranged from Poland's handling of the coronavirus pandemic to tensions with Russia over who started World War II and the Soviet occupation of Polish territory.

“The Russians [view] that as a friendly presence and we call it occupation,” Duda told Kuznetsov and Alexei Solyarov, who goes by Lexus.

Duda told the pair that Poland “had discussions about history” with President Vladimir Putin and denied the prank Guterres’ suggestions that Warsaw might seek the return of the Ukrainian city of Lviv that was part of Poland before the war.

“Excellency, there’s no discussion about it in Poland. [Lviv] is part of Ukraine and that’s the end,” the audibly exasperated Duda said.

Duda’s office has since confirmed the authenticity of the prank call.

“During the conversation, I realized that something was probably wrong,” Duda tweeted Wednesday, saying his suspicions were sparked when the caller pronounced the name of Polish vodka brand Żubrówka better than the real Guterres.

“The voice was very similar,” he conceded, adding a tears-of-laughter emoji.

Embed:

> W trakcie rozmowy zorientowałem się, że coś chyba jest nie tak. Sekretarz Generalny nie wymawia aż tak dobrze słowa „żubrówka”, choć głos był bardzo podobny. ◙
>
> — Andrzej Duda (@AndrzejDuda) July 15, 2020

Poland is investigating how Kuznetsov got through to Duda and whether Russia’s secret services were involved, The Associated Press reported Wednesday.

The Internal Security Agency said it was investigating the actions of an official with Poland’s mission to the United Nations who had allegedly authorized the call.

The prank call has been viewed more than 2 million times in the 48 hours since it was posted.

Vovan and Lexus' previous targets include French President Emmanuel Macron, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson when he was foreign secretary. Several U.S. lawmakers have also fallen victim to the prank calls.

Their level of access to high-profile figures — as well as the lack of intervention by Russian security services — has led observers to suggest that Vovan and Lexus are working under an arrangement with the Kremlin.

The pranksters deny having Kremlin links.

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