

Putin Talks Coronavirus, Navalny Poisoning at Annual Marathon Press Conference

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Sergei Bobylev / TASS

President Vladimir Putin's annual press conference on Thursday focused heavily on the coronavirus pandemic that has hit Russia hard.

The event follows a tumultuous 12 months for the Kremlin that also included unrest across the post-Soviet world, ongoing protests in the Far East and the poisoning of opposition figure Alexei Navalny.

Speaking to journalists via video-link from his official residence outside Moscow, Putin also fielded questions on the economy, foreign relations and whether he will run for president again in 2024.

Here are his main quotes from the marathon press conference, which clocked in at a cool 4 hours and 54 minutes:

On whether he has received the Sputnik V vaccine

— “I’m quite law-abiding. I’ll listen to the recommendations of specialists, so I’ve not done it yet. But I will definitely do it as soon as it’s possible. I see no reason not to get vaccinated.”

[Editors’ note: Experts have warned that Sputnik V could be harmful for patients aged 60 and older.]

— “We’re lacking the equipment and hardware to produce the necessary number of vaccines.”

On the [media investigation](#) naming the FSB agents believed to be behind the Navalny poisoning

— “We know what this is. This is not an investigation, but an attempt to legitimize materials from the American special services,” Putin said, blaming the U.S. special services for “pulling a trick to attack” him personally.

— “As for the patient at the Berlin hospital, this patient is supported by the U.S. special services.”

— “As if we don’t know that [the U.S. special services] trace locations? Our security services know this of course... Our security services keep on eye on him, but that doesn’t mean we have to poison him.”

— “We did not poison him, who needs him? If someone wanted to poison him, they probably would have finished the job.”

— “When his wife asked me, I immediately let her take him to Germany.”

On the recent [investigation](#) into his former son-in-law’s wealth

— “It is impossible to read [investigations] about my loved ones, I just skimmed it.”

— “Throughout, they write about the president’s son-in-law, the president’s son-in-law — but at the end they write that he is a former son-in-law.”

— “It is not prohibited to have assets abroad; only government workers are prohibited from having assets abroad. The company in question is a private company.”

On Russia’s coronavirus response

— “Not one country was ready for [a health crisis on] such a scale. Compared to the rest of the world, our healthcare system turned out to be more effective.”

— “We learned from our friends and immediately gained time and closed the border. We added 270,000 beds and built 40 treatment centers.”

On the 2021 State Duma elections

— “Up to 16 parties can take part in the election campaign next year. They have very different points of view, but at the same time practically each of them acts from a patriotic position. All

have one goal: the well-being and development of the country.”

— “Russia is one of the most open countries in the world. Foreign observers are prohibited in certain states in the United States. We will expand opportunities to achieve the main thing so that citizens in our country are confident in the transparency of elections.”

On alleged Russian election interference

— “Russian hackers did not help Trump to be elected and did not interfere in the internal affairs of this great power. This is a provocation and a reason for the deterioration of relations.”

— “U.S.-Russia relations have become hostages of the internal [U.S.] political situation. I hope Biden understands what is happening, he is an experienced person.”

On Russia’s constitutional changes

— “Before recently, many things were impossible to do. The foundations of our Constitution remain unchanged.”

— “The Constitution was adopted in difficult conditions in 1993. Military tanks were firing at the Parliament, people died. Our Constitution was adopted in these conditions. This happened here, in Moscow. The Constitution created the political basis for development; however, some things needed to be amended.”

“We held an all-Russia vote with a record number of people voting, which is essentially a referendum. Russian citizens became the authors of amendments to the Russian Constitution.”

On 2024

— “Was it worth it or not to amend the Constitution? I have a universal rule. You need to ask yourself: Will this be for the good of the country? If it is, then it's worth doing. I have not yet decided if I will run again in 2024. To do it or not to do it, I will see. Stable development of the country is my priority.”

On jailed ex-journalist Ivan Safronov

— “Whether he gathered information from open sources or not, that's the consequence. He is not being tried for his journalistic activity. He is not a dissenting journalist who fights against power. This is due to the long period of his work as an assistant or adviser to Rosgozin, when he worked in the government and at Roscosmos. The investigation has nothing to do with journalistic activities in general.” *[Editors' note: Safronov worked at Roscosmos for two months before his arrest.]*

— “You said he might have stumbled and that for this, he could be forgiven. In general, he is charged with espionage, treason; the biggest sin that we have is betrayal. Submitting information to a foreign intelligence service equals betrayal, whether he was doing it consciously or not. He might have stumbled. The court will have to determine the degree of public danger. It is too early to talk about a pardon.”

On protests in Khabarovsk over detained governor Sergei Furgal

— “Sergei Furgal is a representative of a well-known party that has supported him and still supports him. I had a good relationship with him. He was a man loyal to the authorities. We did not have any problems with Furgal, he worked hard as the governor of his region. However, he engaged in elimination of his competitors. We are talking about murder — these are serious charges.”

— “I understand the people who voted for him and were disappointed by the news of Furgal’s arrest; however, this is not a political persecution, this is a criminal case.”

— “We shouldn’t make exceptions for any political parties.”

— “Russian law enforcement agencies should extricate themselves from political influences.”

On bearing responsibility for bad relations with the West

— “We are ready to investigate [Navalny’s poisoning with Novichok]. We are ready to investigate with our allies, or let them come here and bring biological material. If anyone has information that chemical weapons were used, give it to us. We have not received an official conclusion about the use of Novichok.”

— “I feel responsible for what is happening in Russia, including the return of the Crimean peninsula to Russia. When the Kosovo referendum was held, you accepted the results, unlike the referendum results in Crimea. Democracy must be recognized everywhere.”

— “Compared to you [the West], we are warm and cuddly. We heard you say NATO won’t expand east. But you did. NATO is approaching our borders. We’re not supposed to respond?”

— “Was it us who withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty? But we have to answer. Our partners withdrew from the treaty on long-range and medium-range missiles. Did we come out? No. [The U.S.] withdrew from the Open Skies Treaty. What should we do in this regard? Will you, as a NATO member, fly over us and gather everything?”

— “You are smart people. Why do you think that we are idiots who are incapable of analyzing obvious things?”

— “In terms of military spending, Russia is ranked 6th after the United States, China, Great Britain and France. So who is warm and cuddly and who is aggressive? Certainly not us.”

— “It’s like Leopold the cat [Soviet cartoon character] used to say: ‘Guys, let’s live in peace’.”

On the eastern Ukraine conflict

— “The resolution of the situation in Donbass is directly dependent on Ukraine’s ruling elite.”

— “They were not able to accomplish much” since the Normandy summit in Paris last December, with many socioeconomic issues still unresolved despite a halt in fighting. Putin said he thinks that’s due to the “lack of political courage” in the Ukrainian ruling class.

— “Officials in Kiev have stated publicly that they are not going to follow through on the Minsk agreement, which is backed by international law. ... Russia plans to increase its support in Donbass.”

On other world leaders

— “All the world leaders I've worked with were well-trained people. These people are dedicated to solving their nation's problems. There are no good or bad world leaders, there are just national interests. I approach this the same way, I represent Russia's national interests.”

— “When it comes to China, we have coinciding interests in many areas. I have a very warm, professional of course, friendly relationship with Xi.”

— “We have opposing interests with [Turkish President] Erdogan right now. However, he is a man of his word; he is a man who does not wiggle his tail.”

This story is being updated.

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