

Vladimir Putin's news conference

Following the G20 summit, the President of Russia answered journalists' questions.

June 29, 2019 10:50 Osaka

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Good afternoon. Let us begin. Go ahead, please.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr President. We would like to ask, since I am the first to ask a question, about your personal results of the summit. There was a lot of scepticism prior to it, coming both from other leaders and expressed by you, concerning the possible results of the summit. Was the scepticism justified? What are the outcomes for world trade and the global economy?

And the second question, if I may: what were Russia's objectives here at the G20, and were the results achieved?

Vladimir Putin: There was certain scepticism, it is true, and not from me alone. Yet on the whole the G20 summit has proved its relevance, we have to admit that, and it was effective in all the major areas of work. The result has been achieved. I think we can congratulate the Japanese presidency on that. Japan did a lot for the summit's success, and its efforts paid off.

I would like to single out four major fields where the needed agreements have been reached. It is true that there were no breakthrough decisions. However, all the participants reconfirmed their commitment to continue efforts to improve the global trade system, including work to reform the WTO. The very fact that

everyone confirmed the need for the process and reaffirmed their readiness to work along the lines is a positive development in itself.

Positions have been coordinated, except for the United States, which always has a special opinion. In fact, the US delegation was open about it from the outset. Everyone knows the current Administration's stance on the Paris Accords. Nevertheless, all the other participants in the forum confirmed their readiness to implement the agreements under the Paris Accords.

Actually, I think there is also a positive moment in the US position too, since the Americans said they were ready to work on the environmental agenda under their own programme. We have to read the final wording but the fact that the Americans say they also want to contribute to solving environmental issues is a positive thing, in my view.

As to Russia, we spoke about it a number of times and we reaffirmed that at the forum again and also agreed on that in the final document. We are going to fully comply with our commitments. In the nearest future we will begin the ratification of these agreements and will conduct the necessary domestic procedures. These issues are highly relevant for us.

I stated this at the last plenary session. Let me remind you that according to the Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring, the warming in Russia is happening 2.5 times faster than the average global warming. This is a major challenge for us. We must realise that. This is the reason for floods, and for permafrost thawing in the areas where we have fairly big cities. We must be able to understand how to react to the climate changes underway there.

In this connection, I informed my colleagues on our national programme in the sphere of environment, a transition to the best available technologies in this area, as well as on a number of other measures we are taking in this field.

Next, it is crucial for us, and I think it is also a very positive thing – we all know that

the Internet is regulated in various ways by different countries. Nevertheless, all the G20 summit participants concluded that we must do everything to prevent negative information that is related to terrorism from spreading online. It must be careful joint work that is utterly important not only for the G20 nations but also for the whole world. The major trends that I have just listed are of interest to us and they all are part of our priorities.

Oh, sorry, I missed another important area, as I said there were four of them. The fourth is digitalisation and work on AI. The G20 has been dealing with that, and it has dealt with it here, and there is a common decision on it. It is giving recommendations and indicating a direction for its development. As you know, we are working on our own AI programme. We have made a decision and the details are being finalised now, but it is also very important for us. It is unquestionably one of our development priorities.

Please, go ahead.

Question: I would like to ask you about your meeting with Mr Trump. If you had any expectations, did they materialise, and what did you talk about? I am particularly interested if there is any progress on extending the New START treaty.

And another issue. When Mr Trump refused to meet with you at the previous G20 meeting, he said it was because of the situation in the Kerch Strait and that he would not meet until the Ukrainian sailors are released. Will you please tell us if he raised this topic this time.

Vladimir Putin: To begin with, this topic was raised, I do not remember now if it was during the lunch or during our meeting, but the President of the United States made this topic a priority of our communication at the G20 summit. We also spoke about other issues, naturally, but this topic was also raised.

We explained what was going on there and generally spoke about this topic. No decision has been taken as of yet. The case is currently being tried in court. We have to wait until it is finished. After that we will make a decision. The key is to make sure

it is disengaged from the Ukrainian election campaign so that such processes are not related to the internal political agenda in Ukraine.

As far as the New START treaty is concerned, we instructed our foreign affairs departments (Mr Lavrov on our side and Mr Pompeo on the US side) to launch consultations on these questions. I do not know yet if those consultations will lead to the extension of the New START treaty, it is too early to speak about it, but we talked about this issue.

Question: What are your impressions of the meeting in general?

Vladimir Putin: It was a good meeting. Very business-like and pragmatic. We have covered practically the entire range of issues of mutual interest. By the way, it also included our economic relations. It was agreed that they are unsatisfactory. We once again pointed at the US business community's interest in enhancing economic relations with Russia.

I drew the US President's attention to the fact that the US delegation was one of the biggest at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum: there were over 500 members in the delegation, I think 550 people. So it gives us food for thought. We reasserted readiness to establish a respective structure made up of business communities' representatives to study issues of further developing our trade and economic relations. We naturally talked about the situations in various regions of the world. Overall, those were useful consultations.

Please, go ahead.

Question: Good afternoon.

We saw yesterday the beginning of your meeting with Theresa May. It was impossible to miss the attitude she displayed during the handshake. But we certainly remember the statement that relations with Russia cannot be revived unless Russia fulfils certain conditions. Yet the meeting did take place.

What did you talk about? Was this meeting necessary at all considering that Ms May is about to step down? Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Regarding this meeting, the Prime Minister did indeed ask questions about Mr Skripal. They were prompted due to the fact that your colleagues from The Financial Times raised this issue again and I had to answer it. This provoked a return to the issue.

The Prime Minister indeed takes a very tough stance on this matter. We talked about it and clarified our positions. However, I still think that common sense must prevail. I am confident that we need to restore full-scale relations; this was also what the UK businesspeople spoke about when I met with them just recently in Moscow. None of the British companies left, are leaving or will leave the Russian market. In fact, they want to step up cooperation. This is why the politicians' task is at least not to hamper the development of a normal situation, and it will be better if they support these positive trends.

Whether the meeting was needed or not, I think that it was, because why not? Yes, she is about to step down but, firstly, today she is the current head of government. And secondly, even a small step in the positive direction is never wasted.

Go ahead, please.

Question: You have just had talks with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, thus my question: did you agree on what should be done with the OPEC+ deal and will you extend the oil production cuts and for how long? In October you are going to Saudi Arabia – at least your aide said so recently. What other agreements are you planning to make during that visit to Saudi Arabia? I take it you also spoke about it with the Crown Prince.

Vladimir Putin: Regarding the future visit, preparations for it are currently underway, so it is too early to speak about the questions that may be resolved during that visit.

As for today's meeting with the Crown Prince, we did discuss the possibility

of extending our agreements with OPEC regarding oil production cuts. I want to inform you that it may have a certain importance for the market; we agreed to extend the agreements, or at any rate we will support extending the agreements, both Russia and Saudi Arabia. By the way, the cuts will be in the previously agreed volume. As to for how long, we will have to think about it, whether for another six or nine months – maybe up to nine months.

Question: As was mentioned earlier, we all saw Theresa May's very stern face as she met you yesterday. She said that it was impossible to have a different relationship with Russia unless Russia chooses a different path. I'd like to hear what your response to her was. Is Russia, as Mrs May says, ready to stop its external attacks, its aggression, its meddling in elections, and to take a different path, not only to improve relations with Britain, but also with the rest of the West?

Vladimir Putin: I have great news for you: we never had any intentions to commit any aggressive acts towards anybody. It is an illusion, wishful thinking, and what is wished for is to have an external adversary whose presence helps solve domestic policy issues. We have no aggressive intentions towards anybody.

Yes, I can confirm what I have already said. The Prime Minister acted at our meeting the way she described publicly. She expressed her position in a fairly tough form. Yes, it is true, that is the way it was. I informed her of Russia's position on a number of issues that act as irritants in our relations.

I would like to draw you attention to the fact that our actions with respect to our partners will always be mirror-like: we will offer them the same attitude as they show towards us. I want everyone to remember that.

Go ahead, please.

Question: As we have learnt, the Iran issue was discussed during your meeting with Mr Trump. Did you talk about Iran's presence in Syria? We have noticed the presence of your envoy for Syria here. This is a sensitive issue for the Americans.

Also, did you discuss the situation in Idlib during today's meeting with Mr Erdogan? The Syrian and Turkish armies exchanged fire yesterday; the escalation reached a new high. Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: We maintain constant dialogue with our US partners; we have established good contacts on the ground, as they say, to coordinate our actions and efforts to fight terrorism. There are some hotbeds there, and I told the President about the latest joint actions – well, not joint actions but rather coordinating those actions. So there was no need for us to immerse into the details at the level of presidents. This is being done rather successfully at the operational working level.

As for our Turkish partners and friends, we work with them on a daily basis, even more closely than with the Americans, so that we know about all the developments there and are trying to monitor them together. We also discussed this problem. However, there are some details that should not be disclosed at today's news conference but the situation is under control.

Please, go ahead.

Question: Could you tell us please about the meeting with Angela Merkel, whether you discussed the resumption of the Normandy format, and if you did, what did you decide on?

Vladimir Putin: Yes, we spoke about that, and we agreed to continue to employ this format further. We spoke about some items on the bilateral agenda and on continuing work in the Normandy format. I generally agree with the Chancellor that we must use all instruments, and there are actually not so many of them, and the Normandy format is one of the functioning ones. Yes, we will keep working, the question is when, as the timeframe must be agreed on, and in which order: whether we should first have consultations with just two or three of us and then get all four parties together. Basically, yes, but the details must be worked out by our aides and foreign ministries.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr President.

I would like to ask a domestic question although it has also become international since it has to do with investments in our country. Journalist Ivan Golunov's case was unfolding in Moscow during the St Petersburg Economic Forum. It became possible to prevent this injustice committed by the law enforcement agencies thanks to the involvement of Presidential Executive Office, but especially of the public.

Now, also during an economic summit, a criminal case was filed against Sergei Petrov, owner of Rolf, a large car dealership. I am sure you know him because he is a former politician and was even a State Duma deputy, a constructive opposition member. Can we also talk about injustice in this case, in Sergei Petrov's case, considering the precedents from law enforcement agencies? Could you also take this case under your control? Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: The situation with Golunov was not injustice; it was lawlessness. It was plain lawlessness. And it must be investigated, and appropriate measures should be taken.

As for Mr Petrov, I know nothing about this case; this is the first time I heard about it. I have been here, and, as you say, it happened in Moscow. This is not the kind of information that is reported to me online. I am not familiar with him, I know nothing about his business and I cannot comment in any way, whether it is fair or unfair. Obviously, law enforcement agencies should continue their work and thwart any illegal activities. But I cannot tell you anything about this particular case. Of course, I cannot take under control all cases like that. But I promise you that I will request the necessary information.

Go ahead, please.

Question: Mr President, you have given an extensive overview of different topics. A short time after you last met with Donald Trump, the Americans introduced new sanctions against Russia. Could you tell if you received some reassurances from Donald Trump that no new sanctions will follow this time, or do you think sanctions may be imposed again? Or are you confident that there will no more sanctions?

Vladimir Putin: I have no idea. This is not our business; it is up to the United States to think about how they should build relations with Russia. I think we have mutual understanding that we should somehow get out of the situation that has emerged so far. But this is the same as with our colleagues and partners from the UK. It is an abnormal situation, it must be simply rectified; we must somehow find the strength to turn the page, to move on and to look to the future. It is the same in relations with the United States.

I told you that we reasserted our wish to support the business community's proposal regarding tools for the support of business initiatives. But it shows that the incumbent Administration has intentions to somehow continue with this abnormal situation. I spoke about our trade with the United States and with some other partners. Obviously, \$25 billion in trade does not meet our interests and does not reflect our potential.

That is why I have no idea if they will do anything or not. At any rate, one thing is sure – we are not going to ask for anything. No means no. And if there is interest, we will respond in kind and will do everything we can to turn the situation around.

Let me reiterate, I meet with US businesspeople, including at the St Petersburg Economic Forum. 550 people went there. They want to work. That means jobs, that means goals the President of the United State is trying to achieve. I actually said in that interview that after the globalisation processes led to such big growth of the world economy, even the middle class in the United States felt they were left behind. While large corporation made huge profits, their management got a lot of advantages as did their partners, the middle class did not, not very much. Wages remained the same, and the standard of living began to grow a little. Jobs are needed and conditions to raise real incomes of US citizens. To achieve that they need to expand cooperation and work with everyone, including Russia.

They restricted the operation of their companies in the Russian market. We made calculations across some European countries, and it really amounts to lost profits. Cutting exports (our imports are their exports) amounts to tens of billions of euros. That means jobs, either job cuts or jobs that were not created. The same applies

to the United States. I hope that sanity will prevail in the end.

Question: Just now on the summit sidelines, Emmanuel Macron replied to my question if he comes to Moscow for Victory Day by saying that he definitely will. Was there a clear indication from Donald Trump if he does? Who else did you invite?

Vladimir Putin: We believe the 75th anniversary of Victory over Nazism is the most important event in the world if only because by remembering such events we must do everything possible so that nothing of the kind happens again. And if we consign it to oblivion, the threat of renewed large-scale conflicts will increase. The world is explosive even today. We talk about it a great deal and you yourselves always record and confirm it.

But it is not up to us if they come or not. Our business is to invite them. We respect our partners, and we always underscore the role and significance of our allies during the years of fighting Nazism. By the way, we think of the German underground anti-Nazi fighters in Germany as our allies too. This is why we will be happy if our invitation is accepted. If not, it is not critical. We will celebrate this date in a proper way in any case.

Question: Did you discuss Nord Stream with Mr Trump?

And while you were at the summit here in Japan, Mr Zelensky addressed you, he recorded an address. He was very agitated, he did not demand but asked you to return the Ukrainian sailors. He was angry at his foreign minister: he said that Mr Klimkin allegedly turned down Russia's proposal to return the sailors right away. Is it true that we are ready to do it now if there was such a note from the Russian Foreign Ministry? And is it true that we were invited back to PACE in exchange for a promise that these people will be released? This is also information from Mr Klimkin, so I do not know.

Vladimir Putin: No, PACE and the Ukrainian sailors have nothing to do with that. What I would like to draw your attention to is that the newly appointed Chief of General Staff of the Ukrainian Army confirmed that it was a provocation

masterminded by Poroshenko to boost his election campaign. It is absolutely ridiculous, it is an outrage. Let us proceed from that.

Given this, the Ukrainian side has in fact acknowledged that it was a provocation on their part. We will resolve this issue quietly and efficiently. We have questions regarding some people who were arrested in Ukraine, apart from those sailors. They were following an order and that was it, we are aware of that, but they broke the Russian law. This is why all that must be quietly and efficiently sorted out.

Meanwhile, exchanges go ahead. Quite recently I was told that the Lugansk and Donetsk People's Republics released four people with Mr Medvedchuk's mediation. This is a good example of work, direct contact with the people who should be engaged in dialogue. If the current authorities build up the work in this direction, we will be able to achieve a lot.

Question: You have already mentioned the recent interview with the Financial Times. It has been widely quoted and broadly discussed, especially regarding your feelings towards liberalism. There were those who agree with that and those who disagree, even the famous singer Elton John argued with you, accusing you of hypocrisy. The interview was also discussed here, at the summit, if I am not mistaken. Mr Tusk, Mr Juncker, and I think Mr Macron even talked to you about it.

As other politicians and leaders expressed their opinions, did they support you or, on the contrary, did they argue with you about the liberal idea? Thank you.

Vladimir Putin: Yes, to be honest, it was totally unexpected for me that an interview – which I saw to be routine, ordinary, something passing, in which I did not think I said anything new – should stir such great interest. Some colleagues – I will not be giving their names now – indeed discussed the issues raised in the interview. Some of them supported me on the whole, others opposed and debated with me. So, yes, it did happen.

So you see the point? If we go back to the G20, it is an economic forum. The issues of liberal policy, attitude towards migration and so on were raised here. But regarding

the economy, there are debates between the Peoples' Republic of China and the United States on trade issues, with China being blamed, among other things, for subsidies to industries.

But if we want to discuss the problem of subsidising industries, let us talk about agricultural subsidies, which are very common in the European Union. If this policy continues, a policy that shuts down the market of agricultural products, or, theoretically speaking, keeps the market closed to goods from developing countries, then a question prompts itself: how can the economies of those countries be developed?

The question is: what is the best way for us to unblock discussions within the WTO, and would it not be a better option to direct part of the subsidies to supporting agriculture in the developing countries so as to provide them with jobs? What do our colleagues want? To open the market for the goods that may appear in this case, or to open the borders for migrants? But something will have to be done, either this or that. This is what I was talking about in the interview, in part.

There are other issues related to that liberal idea. This idea is multifaceted, and I do not question its attractiveness on the whole, but look at the migration I have just mentioned. You see, how can one imagine that in some European countries parents are told that "Girls should not wear skirts to school for safety reasons." What is that? Listen, people are living in their own country in their own culture. What is that? How did it get so far? This is what I was talking about.

It has gotten too far, in my view, that this, liberal idea starts destroying itself. Millions of people live their own lives whereas those who promote those ideas, they seem to be living in their own paradigm. This is what I was saying. I don't see anything special about it that I had not talked about earlier.

Or, you brought up the example of Elton John. I have deep respect for him, he is a genius of a musician. In reality he comes to Russia, and we all really enjoy listening to him. I think he is mistaken. I did not give a different slant to anything here; it is true that we really have a very calm attitude towards the LGBT community. Truly, it is

calm and absolutely unbiased.

We have a law that everybody has been kicking us for – a law prohibiting homosexual propaganda among minors. But listen, let a person grow up, become an adult and then to decide who he or she is. Leave children in peace. There are so many inventions nowadays. I also said in that interview that they invented five or six genders, transformers, trans...

You see, I do not even understand what it is.

This is not the problem. The problem is that this part of society is aggressively imposing their view on the majority. We have to be more loyal to each other, more open and transparent. I did not say anything unusual. We have to respect everyone, that is true, but we must not impose our points of view on others. Meanwhile, representatives of the so-called liberal idea are simply forcing their ideas on others. They dictate the need for the so-called sex education. Parents are against it, and they are practically imprisoned for that. This is what I was talking about.

We are aware of what is going on. The question was related to the way we assess the situation in our partners' countries, I think. Yes, people are fed up with that, and this may actually account for the Trump phenomenon, when he won the election, and people's discontent underlies it in many countries of Western Europe, when they walk out into the streets.

This is the point. Meanwhile, everyone is looking for the reasons somewhere far away and trying to blame Russia for what is happening there. Do we have anything to do with it? Yes, there are certain polemics in the information sphere, and we have expressed our point of view about it. Don't they do it themselves? Of course, they do, all the time. We are not making noise or getting hysterical about their constant interference in our affairs, even though their interference is present on a daily basis. But this is what has been established, the practice of international relations, unfortunately. I wish this did not happen. But there are deep reasons and they do not want to admit them. That is what I said about. I think I said nothing new because I have talked about it a number of times before.

Thank you very much.

Publication status

Published in sections: News, Transcripts

Publication date: June 29, 2019, 10:50

Direct link: en.kremlin.ru/d/60857
