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# Interview with Rossiya TV channel • President of Russia

18-23 minutes

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**Sergei Brilyov:** Good afternoon, Mr President.

**Vladimir Putin:** Good afternoon.

**Sergei Brilyov:** No matter what else is happening, and no matter what area of life we discuss, this nasty coronavirus always looms somewhere in the background.

**Vladimir Putin:** That's true.

**Sergei Brilyov:** What do you think about the notorious second wave that scares so many people?

**Vladimir Putin:** What is the second wave? We just talk about it in our everyday conversations or the media talks about the second wave.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Well, all of us have learned something over these past months, and the second wave has become a set phrase.

**Vladimir Putin:** A bit, yes, this is true.

In reality, this implies the development of an epidemiological situation. This is the terminology that the specialists suggest we use.

**Sergei Brilyov:** The situation is getting worse in Europe, more

cases are being recorded.

**Vladimir Putin:** Of course, it is obvious, if we consider that it is the holiday season, and there are many people on the beaches and crowds in bars and restaurants.

**Sergei Brilyov:** No discipline.

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes, of course. All this individualism and a reluctance to respect the interests of an overwhelming majority of society members leads to an outbreak and a relapse that we are witnessing in some countries. I hope that, first of all, this will not happen, and that Europe and other parts of the world will cope with the situation.

On the whole, quite a few people in Russia have fallen ill, but we have one of the lowest mortality rates in the world. This is nothing but a manifestation of the national healthcare system's readiness, our ability to mobilise and the timely nature of decisions to neutralise threats.

I would like to once again express my admiration with the work of our medics. In general, it is a tradition of all people in Russia, including Russians and other ethnic groups, to marshal their resources at the time of trouble. This is what happened this time as well. However, we must also give credit to the federal and regional authorities, which summoned the necessary resources for dealing with the main goals.

And then, as I have said more than once, we focused our attention on what matters the most – the life and health of our people. These common efforts and targeted and, as it turned out, very effective solutions have helped us to pass the peak of the epidemic and create conditions for further work.

However, I never miss an opportunity to say publicly...

**Sergei Brilyov:** You use this screen for doing this, for example, last Wednesday when you held a meeting with the Government.

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes, exactly. So, when I have an opportunity to say so publicly I use it, and I am going to use our conversation now to address the people and to ask them to keep in mind that the virus is still among us, even though this may mean certain discomfort. We must keep this in mind and, of course, try to comply with the restrictive measures suggested by our specialists.

This is really necessary now. The more disciplined we are, the sooner will we be able to resume normal life.

We are conducting numerous research projects, including into the so-called herd or community immunity. It is clear now that herd immunity has already exceeded 25 percent in eight Russian regions. Overall, this means that if we tread carefully, preventing another outbreak of the disease, it...

**Sergei Brilyov:** It will continue to gradually increase?

**Vladimir Putin:** Well, yes, it can increase, and I hope that it will, some day... We are seeing a decrease [in new cases] now, as we all know. But a day will come when the situation will fully stabilise, because, first, we have created the necessary number of specialised hospital beds, the necessary reserve of PPE, as well as medicines for combating the coronavirus infection. It is a well-known fact that we have registered a vaccine.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Let's not rush forward: we will have a separate discussion about this.

**Vladimir Putin:** All right.

In any case, we have created this arsenal, and we can make use of it. Research is ongoing, and our specialists have determined what should be done and how to act so that the disease takes the mildest possible course and ends without serious consequences. And in the future we will certainly make use of every element of the knowledge we have accumulated.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Mr President, a few days ago I had a feeling that I had changed jobs. It happened when you made the announcement on the vaccine.

My friends from Latin America (I happen to work with people from this continent) turned me into a staff reporter for television of Argentina, Uruguay and some other countries. Don't know but I'll allow myself to think so... Actually most of them told me that when you mentioned your daughter who had the injection [of the new Russian vaccine], this left a big impression on them. I know how rigorous you are when it comes to personal matters of this kind. But this announcement was instantly met with criticism, especially in the United States and Europe.

By the way, you had a meeting with Government members from this office, and discussed the second vaccine. But what do we hear in response? "What kind of a vaccine is it, if it went through just two phases of trials? What are these Russians talking about?" And it is true, there were only two phases of trials.

**Vladimir Putin:** No. We did everything that was required to register the vaccine, but with an asterisk, as we say. This means that this vaccine will have to undergo further research as part of a mass vaccination campaign. Therefore, we acted in strict compliance with the Russian law, and the Russian law is consistent with

the international practices and regulations that apply in other countries.

The vaccine went through pre-clinical and clinical trials, and was tested on animals as well as volunteers. Our specialists are absolutely confident today that this vaccine creates lasting immunity and people get antibodies, as was the case with my daughter. This vaccine is also harmless. Thank goodness, my daughter feels fine.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Did she seek your advice on this? Of course, she is an adult.

**Vladimir Putin:** She is an adult. She just said that she took this decision.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Was she a volunteer or was this decision linked to her job?

**Vladimir Putin:** She volunteered, and considering her profession she needed it.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Are we talking about the one who works in the biomedical sector?

**Vladimir Putin:** She works with many people, and in order to work normally, she needed a sense of security.

As I mentioned, her temperature and was 38.4 the first day, and slightly above 37 the next day, that was it. After the second injection, 21 days later, she also had a slight temperature, but everything is fine. I just spoke with her by phone. She is well. Thank goodness, everything is fine.

To reiterate, research will continue, but in this country, everything takes place within Russian law, which is quite in line with

international practices. In September, we should have another vaccine. If the drug we are talking about has been proposed, researched and registered by the Gamaleya Institute, then...

**Sergei Brilyov:** That is, Sputnik V.

**Vladimir Putin:** That's right, Sputnik V. The second drug, as they have reported to me, will be ready in September. It is being developed by the well-known VEKTOR Institute in Novosibirsk. I am confident that the specialists at VEKTOR will make an excellent drug that will help people a lot.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Will they compete, these two drugs, or are they mutually complementary?

**Vladimir Putin:** You should ask the specialists. I think that they will most likely compete, because they should not be inferior to each other in terms of safety and effectiveness.

**Sergei Brilyov:** The economic decline.

In fact, analysts at Oxford some ten days ago and Moody's during the last twenty-four hours provided figures on the Russian economic downturn. Generally, the Russian economy appears to be in a fair state in comparison with the United States. Regrettably, the rest of the world actually depends on the United States. But if we really look at what is taking place, how sensitive is it and what are the prospects for a recovery?

**Vladimir Putin:** The entire global economy is facing the aftermath of this epidemic. If we recall 2008 and 2009...

**Sergei Brilyov:** That crisis?

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes, that crisis. The global GDP fell by 0.1 percent. This time, according to the IMF, the World Bank and other

organisations, there will be about 5 percent. It is a huge difference. Many people are comparing this with the Great Depression of the 1930's or even with the post-war events.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Well, in the countries hit by the 1930's depression, the decline is more significant than it was then.

**Vladimir Putin:** In the United States, for example, it is 9 [percent]. The forecasts for this country are 8.5 [percent], but our specialists believe the figure will be lower than that.

**Sergei Brilyov:** In the environs of 5 [percent], I believe.

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes, in the environs of 5 or 6 percent. The United States had 9.5 [percent] in the first six months, and the eurozone had minus 15 percent. Some experts – we know this well – say that this results from the difference in the structure of our economies.

Yes, to a certain degree, this seems to be so, but mostly this is the result of the Government's decisions that are targeted and timely, something that is also of great importance, as I see it.

Of course, there are some inevitable problems. I know that some companies that were hit hard are not on the list of those receiving state assistance. And, of course, the Government should think about this and make the appropriate timely decisions.

On the whole, I repeat, support for small businesses and support for certain major sectors, including agriculture, the automotive industry, construction, etc, that employ hundreds of thousands and millions of people as part of co-production chains – all this was accomplished on time and yielded a positive effect.

As you can see, our key macroeconomic indicators remain sufficiently stable. Despite predictions of major fluctuations,

the current inflation rate is just 3.4 percent. According to experts, it will stay at 3.4–3.41 percent.

**Sergei Brilyov:** And oil costs \$46 once again.

**Vladimir Putin:** It would be better if it cost more.

**Sergei Brilyov:** But this is no what has been forecast initially.

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes, of course, but our reserves are also increasing despite all difficulties. This creates an additional safety cushion, which is important. It is not a cure-all against all troubles, but it is important. This makes us feel confident that, if need be, we can finance our social obligations.

All this means that, first of all, we believe that we have overcome all the main problems, and I hope that we will now start recovering gradually. On the whole, we do not differ much from other countries in this respect. I believe that this recovery will be guaranteed next year.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Indeed, may God give us all health in the direct sense of the word, plus economic health.

**Vladimir Putin:** Yes, of course.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Mr President, it is not only the purely economic things that affect the economy (for example, the oil prices returned to \$46 as we predicted) but also political factors. Belarus is, certainly, a political factor.

**Vladimir Putin:** Of course.

**Sergei Brilyov:** We have seen numerous reports on your telephone conversations with European leaders. But these reports are usually just scanty press releases from the Kremlin Press Service. In fact, you have not yet publicly shared your view

of the situation in detail. What do you think of the developments in Belarus?

**Vladimir Putin:** You know, I think that we have shown much more restraint and neutrality with respect to the events in Belarus than many other countries, both European and American ones, such as the United States.

In my opinion, we have indeed been covering the developments in Belarus quite objectively, from every angle, showing both sides. We believe that it is up to the Belarusian society and people themselves to deal with this. Although, certainly, we care about what is happening there.

This nation is very close to us and perhaps is the closest, both in terms of ethnic proximity, the language, the culture, the spiritual as well as other aspects. We have dozens or probably hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of direct family ties with Belarus and close industrial cooperation. Suffice it to say that, for example, Belarusian products account for more than 90 percent of the total agricultural imports on the Russian market.

**Sergei Brilyov:** You mean the Belarusian products imported to our country?

**Vladimir Putin:** Belarusian exports. If we look at other industries – for example, agricultural equipment manufacturing – the figures are similar. Therefore, of course, we care about what is happening there. But it is still up to the Belarusians to deal with this situation.

We most certainly hope that all the parties will have enough common sense to reach a solution in a peaceful way, without running to extremes. Of course, if the people take to the streets, it cannot be ignored. Everybody must listen to them and respond.

By the way, the President of Belarus said that he is willing to consider conducting a constitutional reform, adopting a new Constitution, holding new parliamentary and presidential elections based on the new Constitution. But the effective Constitution must not be breached. Did you note that the Constitutional Court of Belarus issued a ruling, according to which it is absolutely unacceptable to establish supra-constitutional bodies which are not envisaged by the country's basic law and which are trying to take over power. It is hard to disagree with this ruling.

**Sergei Brilyov:** I looked at what they are writing about Belarus abroad, and often it is not about ideology but simply about facts. A lot of foreign articles about the events in Belarus are accompanied by an explanation what Belarus is and where it is located. This is because as distinct from Russian citizens, many people there know little about it. And, of course, in Russia we remember the events not only after the election but also before it, in part, about the 33 guests at the Byelorusochka hotel and the Russian citizens that were detained.

Mr President, who do you think got into whose trap?

**Vladimir Putin:** Well, now it is obvious. This was an operation by secret services. The people you mentioned were used without their knowledge in order to move them to Belarus. They received perfectly legal assignments. They were told that they must go to third countries, to Latin America and the Middle East, for absolutely legal work. But in fact they were dragged off to Belarus and presented as a potential attack force in order to destabilise the situation during the election campaign. This had nothing to do with reality.

Let me repeat that these people were going to work in a third country. They were simply lured there, dragged across the border. By the way, our border guards did not let them out and they could not move in anywhere. But de facto they were brought in on fake documents.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Ukrainian secret services?

**Vladimir Putin:** This was an operation of Ukrainian secret services in cooperation with their US colleagues. Now this is known for sure. Some participants in this event or observers, well-informed people do not even conceal this now.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Mr President, I think I have been lucky in my career as a journalist. I had three detailed interviews with Alexander Lukashenko but you know him much better, of course. In this context, I would like to quote what Mr Lukashenko said after one of his telephone conversations with you.

**Vladimir Putin:** Go ahead.

**Sergei Brilyov:** He said that when it comes to the military component, we have a treaty with the Russian Federation in the framework of the Union State and the CSTO, that is, a Collective Security Treaty Organisation, and these aspects seem to be covered by that Treaty. Somewhat earlier he said you agreed to provide assistance to Minsk at his first request.

What is meant by “these aspects”?

**Vladimir Putin:** There is no need to hush up anything.

Indeed, the Union Treaty, that is, the Treaty on the Union State, and the Collective Security Treaty (CSTO) include articles saying that all member states of these organisations, including the Union

State, which consists of two states only – Russia and Belarus, are obliged to help each other protect their sovereignty, external borders and stability. This is exactly what it says.

In this connection, we have certain obligations towards Belarus, and this is how Mr Lukashenko has formulated his question. He said that he would like us to provide assistance to him if this should become necessary. I replied that Russia would honour all its obligations.

Mr Lukashenko has asked me to create a reserve group of law enforcement personnel, and I have done this. But we have also agreed that this group would not be used unless the situation becomes uncontrollable, when extremist elements – I would like to say this once again – when the extremist elements, using political slogans as a cover, overstep the mark and start plundering the country, burning vehicles, houses, banks, trying to seize administration buildings, and so on.

During our conversation with Mr Lukashenko, we came to the conclusion that now it is not necessary, and I hope that it will never be necessary to use this reserve, which is why we are not using it.

I would like to say once again that we proceed from the belief that all the current problems in Belarus will be settled peacefully, and if any violations are permitted by either side – the state authorities and the law enforcement personnel, or the protesters – if they exceed the framework of the law, the law will respond to this accordingly. The law must be equal for everyone. But speaking objectively, I believe that the Belarusian law enforcement agencies are exercising commendable self-control despite everything. Just

take a look at what is happening in some other countries.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Yes, but the first two days were awful for many people.

**Vladimir Putin:** You know what I think about this. Was it not awful when people died in some European countries nearly every day?

**Sergei Brilyov:** This is why Lukashenko rejected Macron's mediation, offering instead to help him deal with the yellow vest protests.

**Vladimir Putin:** Is it not awful when a defenceless person is shot in the back and there are his three children in his car?

**Sergei Brilyov:** Yes, it is awful.

**Vladimir Putin:** Have those who are putting the blame on Belarus and the Belarusian authorities, President Lukashenko, have these people condemned these acts? I have not heard anything about this. Why such discrimination?

This makes me think that the issue is not the current events in Belarus, but that some forces would like to see something different happening there. They would like to influence these processes and to bring about the solutions that would suit their political interests.

Therefore, I would like to say once again that the general situation [in Belarus] is improving, by and large. And I hope that all the problems – and there are indeed problems, because otherwise the people would not have taken to the streets – that all these problems will be settled peacefully within the framework of the Constitution and the law.

**Sergei Brilyov:** Thank you, Mr President.

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