

Vladimir Putin gave an interview to Swiss media. The interview was recorded on July 25 in St Petersburg, during the President's visit to the preliminary round draw for the 2018 Football World Cup.

Question: Good evening, Mr President. Thank you very much for making the time for this interview.

Vladimir Putin (In French): Bon Soir.

Question: We are currently in the city of St Petersburg, where the draw ceremony is underway for the 2018 Football World Cup, which will be held in the Russian Federation, and to which you are devoting so much energy.

Vladimir Putin: Yes, this is true. Congratulations to all of us.

I can honestly tell you, and there is nothing new: we do not have any special ambitions in this upcoming championship, although we certainly expect a good performance from our team.

Our goal in holding this competition fell in line with FIFA's goals – namely, broadening football's geography. I won't even mention that Russia is a very large nation – the biggest in the world in terms of territory, and the largest in Europe in terms of population.

In addition to everything else, we have a visa-free regime – free movement – with most of the former Soviet republics, which are now independent states. And naturally, this event will be important not only for Russia but our closest neighbours as well.

Question: You are friends with Mr Blatter; you supported him.

Vladimir Putin: You know, we barely knew one another before we began the process of our bid, our fight for the 2018 World Cup. During this joint work, we had many meetings with representatives of the FIFA executive committee, with the commissions that came to our nation, and we met with Mr Blatter himself. We developed very good business relations and good personal relations.

Question: As for these criminal proceedings, which are currently underway in Switzerland, do you feel that the United States is involved in any way?

Vladimir Putin: As far as I know, the United States was bidding to hold the 2022 World Cup in their nation.

Question: You think they took revenge?

Vladimir Putin: I have not finished my sentence... And their closest ally in Europe, the United Kingdom, was bidding to host it in 2018. And the way the fight against corruption is playing out causes me to wonder whether this is a continuation of the battle for 2018 and 2022.

After all, nobody is against fighting corruption; everyone is for it. And I feel that we should fight even harder. But there are certain international legal norms stating that if somebody suspects a crime committed by anybody, certain data are collected and given to the prosecutor general's office in the state of which the suspect is a citizen. But this is not related in any way to the fact that one nation – big or small – travels throughout the world, grabs anyone it wants and takes them to their prison. In my view, that is unacceptable.

I repeat, this does not mean we shouldn't fight corruption.

Question: Mr President, a fairly important question for you and for the United States of America. Do you think these actions, which are now being taken within the FIFA framework, are a return to a kind of

imperialist policy by the United States?

Vladimir Putin: A return? They have been conducting an imperialist policy for a long time; this is simply reinforcing that state. I have already stated this many times publicly – and not just me, but political analysts within the United States, who also speak of exactly this, and in these exact words. These American experts in foreign and domestic policy feel that this imperialist bent is detrimental to the US itself.

This position is not related in any way to anti-Americanism; we have a great deal of respect and love for the United States, and especially for the American people. I feel that these are simply unilateral actions and the expansion of jurisdiction by one nation beyond the territory of its borders, to the rest of the world, is unacceptable and destructive for international relations.

Question: Western nations' opinions about you are divided. As you know, some are delighted by you while others condemn you. When you once again spoke of your nuclear arsenal, many began to talk about the threat from your side.

Vladimir Putin: This is done by dishonest and inattentive people. The process of starting a new arms race began from the moment of the United States' unilateral withdrawal from the ballistic missile defence treaty. Because this agreement was a cornerstone for the entire international security system. And when the United States withdrew from it and began to create a missile defence system as part of its global strategic weapons system, we immediately said: we will be obligated to take reciprocal steps to maintain a strategic balance of power.

I want to say something very important: we are doing this for ourselves, to ensure the security of the Russian Federation, but we are also doing it for the rest of the world, because this strategic stability ensures the balance of power.

Question: We are currently in St Petersburg, a city that suffered a great deal in the war. As far as I understand, your grandfather and grandmother lived through...

Vladimir Putin: My mother and father. My brother, whom I never met, died here during the blockade.

Question: Is another war possible in Europe today?

Vladimir Putin: I hope not. But I would really like to see Europe demonstrate some real independence and sovereignty and be capable of defending its national interests, the interests of its people and its nations. I want to come back to the previous question. A strategic balance allowed peace throughout the planet and prevented major military conflicts in Europe and throughout the world. And when the United States withdrew from that agreement, they said, we are creating a missile defence system that is not against you, and you want to develop a strike force; do what you want, we will assume it is not against us.

And we are doing exactly what we had stated long ago. The global missile defence system is expensive and it is still unclear how effective it is. And we are developing strike systems capable of overcoming any missile defence system. And what I announced just recently has been in our plans for several years, and was publicly announced long before.

Question: You said that you would like Europe to be more independent. For example, as far as France is concerned, during De Gaulle and Mitterrand's times. How do you currently feel about what is happening there?

Vladimir Putin: I still need to finish the previous question.

All our strategic defence actions correspond fully to Russia's international obligations, including within the framework of the agreement with the United States on strategic arms.

Now, regarding sovereignty. Participation in any military and political organisation or bloc is associated with the voluntary renunciation of a certain share of one's sovereignty.

I think that at the time, France withdrew from NATO to preserve its sovereignty more than it is possible within the framework of a military bloc. It is not our business to analyse European nations' foreign policy. But I think you'll agree that if we need to discuss intra-European affairs with European partners in Washington, it is not very interesting.

Question: Mr President, right now, we are observing a rather ironic turn in history. Currently, we are seeing you garner more support among right-wing and even extreme right parties in European nations than left-wing parties; for example, Marine Le Pen in France and the UDC in Switzerland. What do you think about this?

Vladimir Putin: I think that this is not so much support for me as the realisation of national interests as the political parties see them.

There are certain tectonic changes underway throughout the world and in Europe within the public consciousness, which are aimed at defending national interests. You must understand that right now, Europe is facing a specific problem, an influx of immigrants. And did Europe make the decision that ultimately led to this situation? We need to be sincere and honest: these decisions were made across the ocean, but Europe must deal with the problem.

Question: You mean the United States.

Vladimir Putin: Of course. This is just one example, but there are many. But this does not mean – and I already said this – that we should somehow demonise US policy; that is not my goal. They are conducting their policy as they see necessary in their interests.

We must strive to find a balance of interests; we need to invigorate our work, give new momentum to the work by the UN Security Council. The US is certainly a great power and the American people created this nation over several centuries, it is simply an amazing result. But that does not mean that today's US authorities have the right to travel throughout the world and grab anyone to drag back to their prison or act from a position of "anyone who is not with us is against us."

We need to be patient and work with our American colleagues to find solutions, the way we have in some areas of our cooperation, such as with the Iranian nuclear issue.

of the people who are combatting Islamism. Do you think Europeans are on your side on this issue?

Vladimir Putin: You know, when we were only beginning this struggle and came across problems in the Caucasus, I was amazed to see that even though we had proof that we were dealing with a terrorist threat, that we were fighting Al Qaeda representatives, we had no support. When I asked my colleagues, including those in Europe "Don't you see what is going on?" they said they did see, but could not support us 'due to certain circumstances, including internal policy and international ones'. Then, I would say "Fine, if you cannot support us – don't, but at least do not stand in our way."

Now I see that the situation has changed. Europe and the United States have come to see the real danger of the extreme manifestations of radicalism and have joined this struggle. We here say 'better late than

never'. However, we have strong hope that not only in this direction, but also on other matters – on regulating the situation in Ukraine and on economic matters – we will maintain a dialogue and achieve mutually acceptable solutions.

I believe we have covered all the questions dealing with FIFA.

Question: The last one, Mr President. We spoke of Mr Blatter at this point on purpose. As for Angela Merkel, she is one of your colleagues with whom you frequently communicate. She speaks German, so do you communicate in German?

Vladimir Putin: Yes, we usually speak German.

As for Mr Blatter, you know, I would like to end with this, since this was what we started with. We all know the situation that has developed around Mr Blatter. I would not like to go into detail, though I do not believe a single word about corruption regarding him personally.

I believe that people like Mr Blatter, such heads of major international sports federations deserve special attention and gratitude from public organisations. If anyone should be awarded Nobel prizes, it is these people, because it is they who improve cooperation between nations and make an enormous humanitarian contribution to the development of good neighbourly relations between people and states.

Question: The last question, Mr President. The last question I would like to ask. In Europe you are now being portrayed as the new Stalin, some people present you as an imperialist. Some love you, of course, and appreciate you, but others present you in this particular way. There are even those who say that after all these years that you have been in power, you have gone mad. What would you respond to these people?

Vladimir Putin: After our interview, do you think I am mad?

Question: You are smiling, despite all the prejudice.

Vladimir Putin: This is part of political struggle; it has been part of my life for quite a number of years. I try not to pay too much attention to it. I simply do what I think is necessary in the interests of my country and my people.

It is not in Russia's interests to be in confrontation with other countries, but sometimes we are forced to protect our interests, and we will undoubtedly continue to do so. However, we will seek solution not in confrontation, particularly military confrontation, but in finding compromise and mutually acceptable solutions.

With your help I would like to address not those who criticise me, but those who support me. I would like to thank them for their support and tell them that we will continue moving ahead together. Primarily I am referring not even to those who paint my portraits, but to those who sympathise with what we are doing and agree with it deep inside.

Merci beaucoup (in French).