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THE ANDREW MARR SHOW

INTERVIEW:

VLADIMIR PUTIN,

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT

JANUARY 19th 2014

PRESIDENT PUTIN

Extremists are always trying to draw attention to themselves, especially in the run-up to major events – and not only sports events, but also political ones. You know very well what security measures have to be taken during meetings of Heads of State at the G20, the G8 or other forums. The same applies to major sports events. It's a shame.

Extremists are narrow-minded people who do not realise that even if they – in their own minds – set themselves noble goals, by committing terrorist acts they are drifting further and further away from achieving those goals.

The whole world sees them as criminals – criminals of the worst kind; bloodthirsty people who have no regard for human rights and freedoms, or for human life itself.

I'd like to thank all our partners, in the US, Europe, and Asia, who are co-operating actively with their Russian counterparts in law enforcement, and in our special services. This joint work is on-going.

Security is being ensured by 40,000 police and security forces personnel. We will protect our airspace, our seas, the mountains all around. But I hope this can be done in a way that's not too obvious, or oppressive, to those taking part in the Olympic Games.

GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS, ABC NEWS CORRESPONDENT:

A Swiss member of the International Olympic Committee said that the corruption problem has actually been massive. He said it's an everyday matter. Up to £18 Billion dollars embezzled. Is he right, and what can be done about it?

PRESIDENT PUTIN:

Not true. First, the Swiss representative did not say that.

Secondly, if anyone has concrete information on instances of corruption in relations to the Sochi Olympics project, we ask them to give us objective data. We would be glad and grateful, and we will use this information to put things right.

What is corruption? In this case it means theft of public funds with the help of state officials. If anyone has such information, give these findings to us, please. But besides talk, no one has given us anything.

We understand there are some forces which are against everything, even the Olympics project. I don't know why – it's what they do, probably they are inclined to it, somebody offended them in their life.

We have not seen any big instances of corruption in terms of the Sochi Games. There have been attempts by executives, contractors to drive up the price. But this goes on in every country in the world. Our task is to bring the price down and to achieve good quality, and to meet the deadlines for construction.

There is also a moral aspect to this, and no need to be ashamed of it. After the collapse of the Soviet Unions, after the dark and let's be honest, bloody events in the Caucasus, people were negative and pessimistic. We have to pull ourselves together and realise that we can deliver large-scale projects on time, and to high standards.

ANDREW MARR:

Many prominent British people – Sir Ian McKellen the actor, Elton John, many politicians – have expressed a great deal of unease, unhappiness and fear about the Russian attitude to gay people. Meanwhile the Russian Foreign Ministry has, and I quote, accused the European Union of 'queer propaganda'. I wonder whether you're surprised by this huge row coming out just before the Olympics, and whether you think there is a fundamental difference in attitude in Russia and in the West towards gay people; whether you also think that gay people are born not made, and that therefore the question of gay propaganda is a ridiculous one?

PRESIDENT PUTIN:

You know, I can't answer the part of your question about whether homosexuals are born or made. That's beyond my professional interest, I'm just not qualified to respond.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that in Russia, unlike in one third of the world's countries, being gay is not a crime. In 70 countries there is criminal liability for homosexuality, and in seven of those countries, they have the death penalty for homosexuality.

We have recently passed a law prohibiting propaganda, and not of homosexuality only, but of homosexuality and child abuse, child sexual abuse. But this is nothing to do with persecuting individuals for their sexual orientation. There's a world of difference between these things. So there's no danger for individuals of this non-traditional sexual orientation, who are planning to come to the Games as visitors, or participants.

ANDREW MARR:

What about the Russian church people who have called for the return of criminal law against gay people – do you support that, are you horrified by it, what's your attitude?

PRESIDENT PUTIN:

In law, the church is separate from the state and has the right to its own point of view. I would also like to point out that almost all traditional world religions agree on this topic. Is the position of the Holy See different from that of the Russian Orthodox Church? Does Islam treat individuals with non-traditional sexual orientation differently. Actually, it's even tougher!

Read our law carefully – and pay attention to its name. It's called a 'Ban on the propaganda of paedophilia and homosexuality'. There are countries, including in Europe, where they're debating the possibility of legalising paedophilia! Publicly discussing this, in Parliament. They can do what they want, but the people of Russia have their own cultural code, their own traditions.

It seems to me that the law we adopted doesn't harm anybody. What's more, people homosexual people can't feel inferior here, because there is no professional, career or social discrimination against them. When they achieve great success, for example Elton John – he's an extraordinary person, a distinguished musician, and millions of our people sincerely love him, regardless of his sexual orientation.

GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS, ABC NEWS:

President Obama said he's personally offended by the gay propaganda law. Neither he nor his family are coming to Sochi. And he said recently that if Russia doesn't have gay or lesbian athletes, it probably makes their teams weaker. I wonder if you could respond to that. And if gay or lesbian athletes engage in some sort of protest – wear a rainbow pin or some other kind of protest – will they be free from prosecution, under the propaganda law?

PRESIDENT PUTIN:

Protest actions and propaganda are two slightly different things. Similar, but from a legal point of view, protesting against a law is not the same as propaganda for homosexuality or child abuse.

Secondly, I would like to ask our colleagues and friends, before criticising us, to sort out their own problems first. In some states in the US, homosexuality is criminalised. So how can they criticise us, for taking a far gentler and more liberal approach than they have back home?

ANDREW MARR:

Mr President, in the run-up to this feast of sport, there were a lot of amnesties in Russia: Greenpeace, Khodorkovsky, Pussy Riot and so on. Your critics say this is the Russian bear putting on a smile, just for Sochi, and that things will go back to normal afterwards. But I wonder, is there an element of liberalism in the heart of the Russia bear at the moment that we'll see over the months ahead as well?

PRESIDENT PUTIN:

What do you want me to say? *(laughs)*

ANDREW MARR:

I would like you to say 'I'm a warm, liberal president, I've changed my views and no one need fear me in any way at all'.

PRESIDENT PUTIN:

It's true. *(laughs)*

ANDREW MARR:

That's the answer? Ok, marvellous.

PRESIDENT PUTIN:

One more thing, we adopted the amnesty law not in connection with the Olympics, but in honour of the 20th anniversary of the Russian Constitution.

Secondly, in accordance with our law, the decision on the amnesty was not made by the President. It's the prerogative of Parliament. It wasn't me who made the decision, but Parliament. But I certainly support this initiative, and believe it is correct.

We should also strike a balance between those who committed these crimes, and their victims. We talk a lot about the situation of people in prison, or under investigation. And that's correct. But we should never relegate to the sidelines the people who were victims of these crimes.

ANDREW MARR:

You sound very very confident, you've had a very powerful last year, you've been voted the third most popular man in the world – beating the Pope. In the past you've said there's the possibility of standing for election again. I wonder if that possibility is maturing and hardening in your mind? You don't seem like somebody who is bored with being President.

PRESIDENT PUTIN:

I don't think one should pay much attention to such ratings. Besides, no lay person can get the better of the Pope.

As for ambitions, it's too early to talk about this. It's 2014 now, and the elections aren't until 2018. We have to get on with the work now, and then we'll see. The worst thing for a politician is to try and cling to power by every possible means, and focus only on that. In that case, failure is inevitable, because you're always afraid of making the wrong step. You should focus on your work, and time will tell.

GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS, ABC NEWS:

You've talked about promoting fitness, and we've seen you on horseback, we've seen you play judo, we've seen you play ice hockey and fish. Can you tell us about your personal fitness regime these days?

PRESIDENT PUTIN:

Don't eat too much. Practise sports. There are no magic pills here. I do something everyday. Yesterday I was skiing until one thirty in the morning. I go to the gym. I swim a thousand metres every day. Nothing special – but on a regular basis. You know what they say: little by little, achieves success.

INTERVIEW ENDS