

Documentary Shows Putin in Uncompromising Mood

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Artist Alexei Sergiyenko at his Flacon gallery show, "The President: A Most Kindhearted Man," on Sunday.

President Vladimir Putin said in a first-person documentary aired on his 60th birthday Sunday that the current generation of opposition leaders needs to be cast aside, and he brushed aside concerns that the two-year jail sentence for punk band Pussy Riot was too severe.

The documentary portrayed Putin as a tireless and no-nonsense leader contemptuous of domestic and international criticism. It also depicted a Spartan lifestyle of daily exercise, plain breakfasts and late-night working sessions.

Putin said in the program that he welcomed opposing views but that they should come from people willing to take responsibility for running the country. Putin's dismissive remarks addressed at the opposition, which he called "husks" to be thrown out, will reconsolidate anxiety over his perceived disregard for pluralism in Russia.

Celebrations took place all over Russia to celebrate Putin's birthday, although the Kremlin has said the president opted for low-key celebrations with friends and family. The documentary was one of a series of candid public displays of support for Putin.

The leader exuded a typical lack of self-doubt in the documentary, despite the unprecedented street protests that accompanied his re-election to the post of president earlier this year after a four-year hiatus as prime minister.

"From the very first steps, everything I did came in for criticism, but I was absolutely convinced in what I was doing and that there was no other path," he said, referring to his first term as president, which began in 2000.

Three members of the feminist punk band Pussy Riot were sentenced to two years in prison in August for performing an anti-Putin "punk prayer" at Moscow's main cathedral, a verdict that drew global outrage and came to symbolize the Kremlin's crackdown on dissent.

Putin dismissed that criticism, however, and said the court was right in its decision.

"My first reaction was they should ask believers for forgiveness and that would have been that," Putin said. "But they kept building it up and building it up, and so the whole case ended up in court, and the judge slipped them two years."

With the band's case coming up for appeal this week, some will worry about the court's ability to reach an independent decision in the face of the Kremlin's clear position.

Much of Sunday's documentary focused on more trivial details of the president's daily life and fondness for his black Labrador, Koni.

Putin was shown performing daily weightlifting exercises and swimming in the pool at his residence. In an apparent demonstration of Putin's attachment to his work desk, the narrator explains that Putin keeps a flask of tea under his desk.

Koni was seen at her master's side almost at all times and was on occasion lightly chided. "Koni, stop being a pest; it's not nice," he tells the dog as she sniffs at the interviewer.

Later, while the two discuss the ingredients of a vegetable juice made by Putin — of which two elements are garlic and horseradish — the president tells the dog "no, Koni, you can't have any."

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