

Topless Women, Gay Rights Activists Greet Putin in Europe

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Putin reacting to a Femen activist, checking out a new Volkswagen and sharing a laugh with Merkel on Monday. **Fabrizio Bensch**

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Warning 18+: This video of Femen protesters greeting President Vladimir Putin during his visit to Germany contains nudity and written profanity.

President Vladimir Putin's visit to Europe made headlines worldwide on Monday after hundreds of protesters took to the streets in Hanover and Amsterdam, with one of the most eye-catching stunts involving an attack by topless feminist activists.

Putin was taken aback by three topless activists from the radical feminist group Femen as he was attending an annual trade fair in Hanover, Germany.

Having burst their way through the barriers, the bare-breasted women broke into one of the Hannover Messe pavilions at the very moment when Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel were looking it over.

Putin said he liked the stunt but his spokesman called for punishing the feminists.

The Ukrainian activists, widely known for their topless protests around the world, had abusive statements written with black paint across their bodies and were also shouting insulting slogans.

Photographs show that the women had "[expletive] dictator" written in English and "[expletive] Putin" in Russian on their torsos and backs.

Unlike the German leader, who looked clearly startled, as one of the protesters within arm's length of her and Putin, the president remained apparently unfazed and gave the naked woman a "two thumbs up".

"I liked the stunt," he told a news conference after attending the fair. He also added that he didn't get what the women were shouting.

"I didn't even see if they were blondes or brunettes or chestnut-haired," he said, Kommersant reported.

"The security guards work in a very tough way. Such big men ganged up on the girls. I think it's not right, they should have treated them a bit gentler," Putin said.

Meanwhile, his spokesman Dmitry Peskov was less sentimental than his boss, since he said the performance by Femen was "ordinary hooliganism" and called for punishing the protesters, Reuters reported.

Having acknowledged that he had known in advance that the activists were preparing the stunt, Putin doubted the efficiency of such performances for achieving political goals.

"If someone wants to dispute political issues, it is better to do that with their clothes on," he said, Interfax reported. "One should take their clothes off in other places".

The stunt by Femen was the most colorful example in a wave of protests that took place in Hanover and Amsterdam, where the president headed from Germany.

Up to several hundreds of protesters greeted Putin during his two-day visit to Germany on Monday. The demonstrators harangued Putin over Pussy Riot's jailing, restrictions on gays, and the unsolved killings of journalists, as well as the Kremlin's tacit support of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

In yet another eye-catching move, on Amsterdam streets Amnesty International activists placed big yellow banners that mocked human rights violations in Russia.

The slogans included "Punk Bands Strictly Prohibited," "Critical Journalists Not Allowed," "Warning: No Protesting in This Area" and "Independent Lawyers Keep Out." All slogans ended with a similar statement which said "Don't frighten President Putin. Keep this area

human rights free."

Another decoration that appeared in Amsterdam ahead of Putin's visit were rainbow flags of the gay pride movement, Reuters reported.

Putin, who paid a short visit to Amsterdam to meet with Queen Beatrix and hold negotiations with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, was also greeted by gay rights activists who protested against pending anti-gay legislation in Russia.

During his visit to Germany that started Sunday, the Russian president discussed a wide range of issues with Merkel, including mutual trade cooperation and the economic situation in Europe.

Speaking at a joint news conference with Merkel, Putin praised the growth rates of the German economy, which he said was a good indication that the European economy remains stable despite the turbulence facing some countries like Cyprus.

Putin said Russia supports the European Union's economic policy but criticized Europe for providing funding to nongovernment organizations in Russia. He said that using the money to rescue struggling economies would have been a wiser decision.

"This money — \$1 billion is big money — could have been channelled to help troubled economies, including Cyprus. And one wouldn't have to rob poor depositors for that," he said, referring to his earlier claim that 28.3 billion rubles (\$896 million) were transferred to the accounts of Russian NGOs from abroad during the first four months of this year.

He also pointed out that Russia had agreed to restructure the 2.5 billion euro loan provided to Cyprus in 2011 in what became the Kremlin's "real contribution" to resolving the Mediterranean country's financial problems.

The decision is the result of long-running negotiations between Russia and the Cypriot Finance Ministry, which has demanded that the loan's terms be eased.

"We made a decision to restructure this loan at the request of the European Commission," Putin said. "It's based on the fact that it's a single case" and that none of the euro-zone countries will follow Cyprus's suit.

Depositors with the Bank of Cyprus and Cyprus Popular Bank, also known as Laiki, are facing heavy losses after the country's government and creditors agreed on a 10 billion euro (\$13 billion) bailout plan.

During his visit to Germany, Putin also had a chance to demonstrate his German language skills. He had to translate a question asked by one of the reporters in Russian to Merkel after the German leader stopped hearing the translation in her earphone as a result of a technical error, Interfax reported.

Putin, who speaks fluent German, worked as a KGB officer in East Germany.

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