

Elton John Hopes 'Putin' Prank Call Highlights Gay Discrimination

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The  **Moscow Times**

British singer Elton John delivers a speech at the 12th Yalta European Strategy Annual Meeting in Kiev, Ukraine.

LONDON — British singer Elton John said on Thursday he was "happy to be pranked" by two Russian comedians impersonating Vladimir Putin if the incident helped shine a spotlight on gay discrimination.

Vladimir Krasnov and Alexei Stolyarov said they had called the singer in a prank call, one impersonating the Russian president and the other posing as his translator, after John told reporters he wanted to meet Putin to discuss lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) rights.

The 68-year-old gay singer posted a picture of Putin on his Instagram account thanking him for the conversation. But a Kremlin spokesman denied the Russian leader had made the call.

"Pranks are funny. Homophobia, however is never funny," John wrote on his Instagram

account on Thursday.

"I love Russia and my offer to talk to President Putin about LGBT rights still stands. I will always stand up for those that are being degraded and discriminated against."

Western states and human rights activists have criticized Russia for its treatment of gay people. John has previously spoken out against a 2013 law banning the dissemination of "gay propaganda" among young people.

"If this unfortunate incident has helped push this vital issue back into the spotlight, then I am happy to be pranked on this occasion," John added in his Instagram post.

On the 11-minute call, John, through a Russian translator, can be heard discussing a visit to Moscow with a man he believed was Putin.

"Tell him I am extremely honored that he is calling me. It is a great privilege to be able to speak to one of the most influential people in the whole world. It's amazing," he says on call, the tape of which was released to Reuters.

The call ends with John saying: "Tell him he has made my day ... it's a very wonderful moment in my life."

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