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Putin says US political system eating itself

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin lavished praise on US President Donald Trump, but added that he was sorely disappointed with the US political system, saying that it has been "eating itself up."

Speaking in a series of interviews with Russian state television which were included in a documentary released on Wednesday, Putin described Trump as a great communicator.

"I have no disappointment at all," Putin said when asked about the US president. "Moreover, on a personal level he made a very good impression on me."

The two leaders met on the sidelines of international summits last year.

Putin praised Trump as a "balanced" man, who easily gets into the gist of various issues and listens to his interlocutor.

"It's possible to negotiate with him, to search for compromises," Putin added.

He also noted that he spent some time talking to Melania Trump when he sat next to her during an official dinner at the Group of 20 summit in Hamburg, Germany in July. The Russian leader said he told her and the wife of the Italian premier "about Siberia and Kamchatka, about fishing ... about bears on Kamchatka and tigers in the Far East."

"I made some exaggerations," the action-loving Russian leader said with a grin. "When you talk about fishing, you can't help exaggerating."

Asked jokingly by the interviewer if he was trying to recruit the women, the KGB veteran responded by saying: "No, I stopped dealing with that a long time ago."

He added with a smile: "But I liked doing that, it was my job for many years."

Venting his frustration with the US political system, Putin said "it has demonstrated its inefficiency and has been eating itself up."

"It's quite difficult to interact with such a system, because it's unpredictable," Putin said.

Russia-US ties long have been strained by the Ukrainian crisis, the war in Syria and other issues, and Moscow's hopes for better ties with the US under Trump haven't materialized. Tensions have escalated further amid the ongoing congressional and FBI investigations into allegations of collusion between Trump's campaign and Russia.

Speaking about the Russia-West rift, Putin said it has been rooted in Western efforts to contain and weaken Russia.

"We are a great power, and no one likes competition," he said.

He said he was particularly dismayed by what he described as the US role in the ouster of Ukraine's Russia-friendly president in February 2014 amid massive protests.

Putin charged that the US had asked Russia to help persuade then-President Viktor Yanukovych not to use force against protesters and then "rudely and blatantly" cheated Russia, sponsoring what he called a "coup."

Russia responded by annexing Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

"Few expected us to act so quickly and so resolutely, not to say daringly," Putin said.

He described the Western sanctions over Crimea and the insurgency in eastern Ukraine as part of "illegitimate and unfair" efforts to contain Russia, adding that "we will win in the long run."

"Those who serve us with poison will eventually swallow it and poison themselves," he said.

Putin wasn't speaking in the context of a former Russian spy who was left in critical condition, along with his daughter, after coming into contact with a mysterious substance in Britain. Some have suggested it was a poisoning in which Russia may have had a hand. Moscow has denied any involvement.

FOREIGN RELATION