

Interview to Dmitry Kiselev

Vladimir Putin answered questions from Dmitry Kiselev.

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Dmitry Kiselev: Mr President, when delivering your Address [to the Federal Assembly], you were figuratively pulling trillion by trillion out of your sleeve. As a matter of fact, you proposed an absolutely astonishing plan of the country's development, truly astonishing. That will be a different Russia, with a completely new infrastructure and social system – nothing short of a dreamland.

But it makes me feel like asking you your favourite question quoting Vladimir Vysotsky, "Where is the money, Zina?" Have we earned it or not?

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Yes, of course we did.

What is more, this plan is, first of all, the result of painstaking work by the expert community, experts from the Government and Administration. Everything fits in the budgetary rules and is actually rather conservative given that certain experts believe that the revenues should and will be higher. And, therefore, we should have planned larger expenditures because this should directly impact economic development prospects.

Overall, this is the right thing to do. Back in 2018, we also planned to allocate additional eight trillion rubles to economic and social development, but later on we increased this figure. I believe that it is quite possible, if things work out the way the optimists from the above-mentioned expert community say they will, that we will be able to – we should and we will do that – increase our expenditures in a number of areas.

Dmitry Kiselev: So, we are talking about a six-year period, right?

Vladimir Putin: Exactly. We are talking precisely about a six-year period. At the present moment, we are working on a three-year budget, that is the budget for a three-year planning period. But when we were preparing for the Address – I use the pronoun "we" because there was a whole team working on that – we naturally assumed that we should calculate our revenues and expenditures in the areas that we deem crucial and high-priority for a six-year period.

Dmitry Kiselev: But still, some projects are truly mind-blowing. For example, the Dzhubga–Sochi highway: 130 kilometres, of which 90 kilometres are tunnels and the rest must be bridges, judging by the landscape. One and a half billion rubles in the first three years alone, with the highway ideally planned to be ready by 2030. Is this really necessary and will we have enough for our victory?

Vladimir Putin: People need this road. Families with children cannot reach Sochi by car. They all stop somewhere around Gelendzhik or Novorossiysk because the road is too challenging – it's a serpentine.

There exist several construction options. We are going to discuss the issue shortly, in the next few days. Either it will be a road to Dzhubga, or first the road from Dzhubga to Sochi. Some Government members suggest doing it step by step. Others believe that all should be done at once, otherwise there will be a bottleneck from Dzhubga to Sochi.

The first section of the road, if we look at it from Novorossiysk, is quite good, and the quality of the pavement is not bad, but it is very narrow. If we continue like that, like the first section, all the way to Sochi, there could be traffic jams in that small space, and they already are quite numerous there now.

Anyway, we will discuss this – specific ways and stages – with the professionals, but it should be done. It is necessary to determine, of course, the final cost of the project to ensure that everyone remains within the financial plans.

The interests of people are in the first place, but the interests of the economy are also a priority. The development of territories in the south of the country is very important.

Dmitry Kiselev: One would assume that the nation is getting better-off rapidly, since we can afford such large-scale investments, especially in view of the special military operation and almost 15,000 sanctions, which are absolutely horrendous. All the more

so as we also want to reduce poverty, including among large families. That's a bold objective, isn't it?

Vladimir Putin: No, it isn't. Here, let me get back to the subject of that highway. When I discussed it with members of the Government – and the Ministry of Finance is always stingy, in a good way, conservative about such spending – the Minister of Finance [Anton Siluanov] told me, and I'm quoting, "Only those who have never travelled this road are against its construction".

Dmitry Kiselev: So we have to get all the Government to go there.

Vladimir Putin: Well, he is right, because it's especially important for families with children.

As for the question of whether we are getting richer. The economy is growing, that's a fact, and it's not us who have registered it, but international economic and financial organisations. Russia has got ahead of Germany in terms of purchasing power parity and replaced it as the fifth largest economy in the world.

As far as I know, the German economy shrank by 0.3 percent last year, while Russian economy grew by 3.6 percent. Japan grew by a small percentage. So if the rate of growth remains the same as it is today, there is a good chance that Russia will overtake Japan as the fourth largest economy, and that might happen quite quickly.

And yet, let us be honest and objective, the quality of our economies is not the same. In terms of purchasing power parity, that is the size of the economy, Russia is actually the fifth largest economy in the world and has every chance of overtaking Japan. But the structure of the economy in these two countries has an obvious advantage over that of Russia.

There is still a lot to be done for our country to take a decent position not only in terms of purchasing power parity, but also in terms of [GDP] per capita. That is the first thing. Secondly, it's important that the structure of the economy itself changes, becomes more efficient, more modern and more innovative. This is what we're going to work on.

As far as revenues are concerned, the purchasing power parity is a very important indicator. This is the volume, or the size of the economy. This means that the state

receives money to address its strategic priorities through the tax system at all levels. This gives us the opportunity to develop in the way we see fit.

Dmitry Kiselev: Mr President, you have mentioned economic structure, the need for structural change in the economy. This is exactly what you set forth in your Address to the Federal Assembly and the challenge is exactly this: make innovative sectors grow faster than the economy as a whole.

Vladimir Putin: Of course.

As I said, we need to work on the structure. That will determine the future of our economy, the future of labour resources, the efficiency, and labour productivity .

One of the main challenges today is to enhance labour productivity. Given shortage of workers, the only one way to achieve effective development is to enhance labour productivity. This in turn means that we need to inject innovation into our economy and aim for greater robotic process automation. Today, as far as I can remember, there are ten robots for every 10,000 workers, whereas we need at least 1,000 robots for every 10,000 workers. That seems to be the case in Japan now.

Then, people need to be trained to operate these new machines, not only robots but also other advanced production tools. So there is another challenge, the training of skilled workers.

We have identified specific areas, including engineering training, where this is a priority. You may be aware that 30 state-of-the-art engineering schools have been opened in different parts of the country. Another 20 will open this year; there will be 50 in total. Fifty more are in the pipeline for the next few years.

So these areas are the future of our nation. We will explore and develop these areas.

Dmitry Kiselev: Just to make sure we've covered the sanctions. A lot of people have voiced the idea of creating a government body specifically to respond to sanctions, to counter them. Is that being planned or do you think it would be pointless?

Vladimir Putin: There's simply no need. The Government, the Central Bank, the Security Council analyse everything that our foes do. Many things are done not

even for political or military reasons, although they are declared, but for reasons of competition.

Dmitry Kiselev: Unscrupulous, unfair competition.

Vladimir Putin: Unfair competition, masked by political or military considerations. This has been the case in the aircraft industry and in many other sectors.

Well, the world is the way it is and we have adapted to its realities. We know who we are dealing with. And so far, as the results of our work show, we have been quite effective.

Dmitry Kiselev: But the West's cunning does not stop there. In your Address to the Federal Assembly, you said, and I quote, "We are also aware of the Western attempts to draw us into an arms race, thereby exhausting us, mirroring the strategy they successfully employed with the Soviet Union in the 1980s." What is our margin of safety under the conditions of what is effectively an arms race?

Vladimir Putin: We need to ensure maximum return on every ruble invested in defence industry. Indeed, during the Soviet era, no one was concerned about these expenditures, unfortunately, efficiency was not a priority. Defence spending accounted for about 13% of GDP of the country – the Soviet Union.

I will not refer to our statistics – instead, I will cite the Stockholm Institute: last year our defence spending was four percent, and this year it is 6.8 percent, meaning we have grown by 2.8 percentage points. This is a noticeable increase, but not critical at all. In the Soviet Union, it was 13 percent, whereas we are currently at 6.8 percent.

It should be noted that defence spending accelerates the economy, making it more dynamic. However, there are limitations to consider, as we understand. The age-old question remains: what is more beneficial – guns or butter? We have this in mind.

Although, as I mentioned, our modern defence industry is good in that it not only indirectly affects civilian industry sectors but also uses innovations necessary for defence industry to produce civilian goods. This is an extremely important thing.

Of course, our spending is incomparable. How much do they have in the United States? 800...

Dmitry Kiselev: It's already nearly 900.

Vladimir Putin: Nearly 900 – 860 or 870 billion [US dollars]. They are absolutely incomparable to our spending.

Dmitry Kiselev: It seems to me that they are embezzling because they have no hypersonic [weapons], nothing... What is it?

Vladimir Putin: I'll explain what it is. The issue is that significant portions of their funds are allocated towards maintenance, not just salaries, but also towards maintaining bases worldwide. It's difficult to track where all the money goes, as it seems to disappear into a black hole. This is where the majority of the embezzlement occurs. Although significant amounts of money which are difficult to evaluate are also spent on producing means of destruction, weapons in general.

If we calculate the cost of their well-known anti-missile defence system and one of our main means to overcome missile defence systems – the "Avangard" intercontinental missile with a glide vehicle of intercontinental range, the values are simply incomparable. Essentially, we nullified all their efforts and contributions to the missile defence system. This is the appropriate course of action.

Additionally, it is imperative that our Armed Forces' economy aligns with current demands.

Dmitry Kiselev: The word "justice" is a magical word for the Russian language. You use it very carefully, but once you pronounced it in your Address and it sounded like thunder. You said that the distribution of the tax burden should become more equitable in Russia and suggested that the Government should think about it. In which direction should it think?

Vladimir Putin: Truly, the distribution of the tax burden should be fair in the sense that corporations, legal entities, and individuals who earn more should contribute more to the national treasury, towards addressing nationwide problems, primarily towards fight against poverty.

Dmitry Kiselev: A progressive tax?

Vladimir Putin: Yes, essentially a progressive tax.

I would not like to go into details now, as we need to work more on this. We need to build a system that really yields greater returns for solving primarily social issues and challenges facing the state in this area.

We plan to reduce the tax burden, for example, for large families, and take further steps in this direction. I believe that society will perceive this as normal. This is the first thing.

Secondly. What does business ask of us? It asks us to determine the taxation system, and not to change it further, so that it remains stable. This is the most important request and requirement from the business.

The Government is to address this issue as soon as possible and work together with the State Duma deputies to present proposals.

Dmitry Kiselev: A progressive tax – won't we scare someone away? We used to be afraid of scaring someone away with this progressive tax.

Vladimir Putin: No, I don't think so. In principle, we have this system in place. Even those who were ardent supporters of the flat scale, the authors of the flat scale, now believe that on the whole we are ripe for a much more selective approach.

Dmitry Kiselev: During your Address, you thanked "colleagues from the Government" – that was the wording. Does this mean that Mr Mishustin's government – if you win – will remain in place?

Vladimir Putin: We should talk about this after the election, after the votes have been counted. It seems to me that now it is simply incorrect. But on the whole, as we can see, the Government is working well – the results are obvious, and that is objective data.

Dmitry Kiselev: You mentioned reducing the tax burden on large families. Children and the demographic situation – these topics were very extensive in your Address. Indeed, the issue is quite painful, because demographically Russia is melting away. Last year was an anti-record of birth rate.

Vladimir Putin: I think the birth rate was 1.31 or 1.39....

Dmitry Kiselev: It's 1.39 children per woman capable of child-bearing.

Vladimir Putin: Of childbearing age.

Dmitry Kiselev: Perhaps ideally we should double it – [to a ratio of] three. Because this is literally a disaster for society.

You have proposed a fairly large-scale programme to support motherhood and demographic stimulation. Is there any confidence that these measures will reverse the downward trajectory to an upward one?

Vladimir Putin: On the whole, there are plans to spend, through various channels, up to 14 trillion rubles on all measures to support families with children over the six-year period. It is an enormous amount of money.

There are numerous areas of support for families with children – from general social support, such as building or renovating kindergartens, building new schools and renovating old ones, modernising them in accordance with the present-day needs, to supporting women from pregnancy till the child turns 18. Allowance is currently paid to nearly 400,000 women, which is almost every third pregnant woman. Over ten million children receive child benefit. This is a serious thing.

We have kept the system of maternity capital. We have continued with the payments of 450,000 rubles for mortgage repayment to families where a third child is born – the relevant decisions are underway. We have preserved mortgage benefits for families with children. In other words, there is a whole package of very diverse family support measures.

Of course, as you have already mentioned, this is also about fighting poverty, because, obviously, families with children face way more difficulties than childless families, which is no surprise as the expenses are huge. Nevertheless, we have achieved considerable progress in this area.

Thus, 20 years ago we had, I think, 29 percent of the population, or 42 million people, living below the poverty line. Today, according to the latest reports, we have

9.3 percent, which is still 13.5 million people. A very large number, indeed. We need to do everything possible to bring it down to at least seven percent. As for families with many children, the figures are more modest, but they also need to be improved.

What are we referring to when speaking of poor birth rates? I have already said many times, and experts say this, – these are objective things – that we have had two dramatic declines in the birth rates. One was in 1943-1944, during the Great Patriotic War. A comparable decline followed immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a very similar one, with the same decline in the birth rate.

The reason is clear: the breakdown of the social support system. No matter how weak it was in the USSR, it was there anyway, but after the collapse of the Soviet Union it basically ceased to exist, leading to widespread poverty. There is no need to explain. Anyway, the planning horizon of a family shrank; the birth rate went down to that of the war years. Then we had a rebound. And now we have quite a large number of children, young people who will reach adulthood and childbearing age in a few years, and we assume that the rates will go up.

What you have mentioned is a worldwide trend. There are only a few developed countries that have positive demographic dynamics, while in the rest of the developed world everything is on the decline. This is a complex problem, which has to do with the economy, as well as life priorities of women. It is better not to interfere right now, let the demographers deal with it and come up with a solution.

But you know what is encouraging? The public sentiment. In Russia, 70 percent of men and 72 percent of women would like to have two or more children, and the state should support them in that regard. We are working on an extensive package of support measures which need to be implemented, and we will do that.

Dmitry Kiselev: However, there is still no certainty that those measures will turn the situation around.

In the late 1990s – it is a well-known story which you have spoken of yourself – you saved your children from fire: you went into the burning building, to the second floor. It was not until later that you remembered about the money left in the house. The money burnt. This shows your priorities: children first, then money.

Maybe the same approach should be adopted on a nationwide scale? Not just 14 [trillion], but to go all in – to launch such a programme that would guarantee a turn of the tide?

Vladimir Putin: You know, you have to, as they say, follow the developments. In the early 2000s, we introduced a number of demographic initiatives, including maternity capital, and a number of other measures, which have produced tangible positive results. This means we are capable of achieving desired goals.

Dmitry Kiselev: So we already have the relevant experience?

Vladimir Putin: We have the experience, for sure. Using this experience and other best practices, we should ultimately aim to achieve the goals we set for ourselves. As the situation changes, we will adjust the existing measures or supplement them with something else.

For instance, we have declared the year 2024 the Year of the Family. We have launched a new national project entitled "Family." It includes elements that we have never used before. For example, there are plans to allocate 75 billion [rubles] to regions where birth rates are lower than the national average. These are mostly the central regions of Russia and the country's northwest. 75 billion is a decent amount of money. It is just that they need to be used wisely.

Elderly care is another aspect. There are other support measures as well. By raising the birth rate and increasing life expectancy, we will be able to stabilise the country's population. This is the main overall indicator that will either demonstrate our success or, possibly, highlight the need for greater attention to the relevant work from all administrative and government bodies.

Dmitry Kiselev: Sure, but there is also a third tool for solving demographic problems all over the world, and that is immigration. What figures can we expect for this six-year period and what does the systematic approach in this work mean?

Vladimir Putin: As for migrant workers, we do not have many immigrants in our country compared to other countries: they make up 3.7 percent of the total number of workers. But they are concentrated in the regions with the highest economic activity, and there are certainly more of them out there. These are the Moscow Region, Moscow,

the Northwestern region and some regions in the North, where they have decent salaries. However, no doubt, this is an issue that requires special attention on the part of the authorities, both local, regional and federal.

What else I would like to add here? It is a very important thing. When labour migrants are attracted, they always say it is necessary to do so because of the shortage of workers. Our entrepreneurs should understand that the situation for them in terms of labour availability will not change for the better in the coming years – they will face labour shortages.

I would like to repeat once again that in order to solve this issue in a totally different way it is necessary to increase labour productivity and reduce the number of workers in those areas where it can be done, achieving even greater results by introducing modern technologies. As we have already discussed, this requires investment in this area and personnel training. This is the primary thing we have to think about.

Generally, of course, migration policy is an important economic tool. There is no harm in looking at the lesson learned of other countries. First and foremost, of course, we should talk about the repatriation of our compatriots. The concepts of repatriation and compatriots are already reflected in our regulatory framework, there is no need to repeat them here.

We should talk about attracting people who perhaps do not intend to move to the Russian Federation, but by virtue of their qualifications and talents in various fields can make a significant contribution to the development of our state, to the development of Russia. We would be glad to attract such people as well.

As for traditional labour migrants, we also need to think about ways to prepare them for coming to Russia, including with our partners in the countries where they permanently reside. This includes studying the Russian language, our traditions, culture, and so on. It is necessary to look after them here too, to treat them humanely. In other words, it is necessary to make efforts to integrate them into our society in a natural way. All of this together should have a corresponding, I hope, positive effect.

Naturally, everyone should observe our traditions and the laws of the Russian Federation. And, certainly, sanitary and other norms must be strictly observed. Ensuring the security of citizens of the Russian Federation must come first.

Dmitry Kiselev: Russians are probably the most divided nation in the world. You had a conversation with participants of the Leaders of Russia competition, and one of your interlocutors said that we discovered in the Zaporozhye region that they were Russians just like us. I got the impression that it sounded like some kind of revelation to them. In general, and it is true, new regions are joining us now, and Odessa is a Russian city. I suppose there are high expectations for this direction too?

Vladimir Putin: Absolutely! The population density in these regions has always been quite high, and the climate is wonderful.

As for Donbass, it has been an industrially developed region since the times of the Soviet Union. The USSR has made huge investments in this region, in its coal mining industry, in its metallurgical industry. Indeed, investments are required to ensure that all production is up-to-date, and people's living conditions, their working conditions are organised in a completely different way – not as they were a couple of decades ago.

As for Novorossiia, it is a region characterised by a strongly developed agriculture. Here, we will do everything to support both traditional spheres of activity and the new ones that smoothly fit into these regions and with people's desire to develop them. You know, the people there are very talented.

What is more, as I have already said, even taxes are already going to the federal budget from there. We need to help them at this stage, to support them, to take them to the Republican, nationwide Russian level. They will start working, and this will happen very quickly.

Dmitry Kiselev: Historically, it is quite clear that Nazi regimes do not dissolve themselves but disappear as a result of military defeat. This was the case in Germany, in Italy, and in Japan. The same will obviously be happening with the Bandera Nazi regime. We are now advancing all along the front line, judging by reports from both the Defence Ministry and our war correspondents.

Did we finally manage to find a strategy when our casualties are reduced on the offensive compared to the defence? This is a rather unconventional task to accomplish in the art of war, but it always holds back the offensive. It is prudence, and it's absolutely reasonable with respect to our heroic warriors. Yet it raises a question: how we can advance with minimal losses?

Vladimir Putin: The question is clear and fair. The answer is also quite simple: we need to increase our weapons in terms of its number and power, while also improving the effectiveness of the forces and means used. This includes both tactical and army air force, as well as strategic aviation. By this I mean, of course, within those aspects that are acceptable for armed conflicts of this kind. Here, I refer to ground weapons, including high-precision ones, also artillery and armoured vehicles. It is no exaggeration to say that we are developing by leaps and bounds.

Dmitry Kiselev: In this direction?

Vladimir Putin: Yes, this is exactly what's happening today. And this is the answer to your question: the more weapons we have and the more powerful they are, the fewer casualties we suffer.

Dmitry Kiselev: And yet one raises a question. What price are we ready to pay for this – perhaps "project" is not the proper word – challenge we have been historically forced to face?

Vladimir Putin: Look, every human life is priceless, every single one. The loss of a loved one to a family, to any family, is a tremendous grief.

But what is the key point here? The point is to make clear what we are doing. And what are we doing? We met today and, as you have noticed, one of the participants in the conversation said: we were surprised to find out that there are Russians there just like us. So we came to the rescue of these people. Basically, this is the answer to your question.

If we leave these people today, tomorrow our losses may increase many times over. Our children will have no future, because we will feel insecure, we will be a third- or fourth-class country. No one will factor us in if we cannot defend ourselves, so the consequences could be catastrophic for the Russian statehood. That is the answer.

Dmitry Kiselev: While the Americans seem to be talking about negotiations and strategic stability, they declare the need to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia. Our position is as follows, "We are open to negotiations, but the time for goodwill gestures has passed, it's over." Does it mean that there will be no negotiations?

Vladimir Putin: We have never refused to negotiate.

Dmitry Kiselev: But is there a compromise without goodwill gestures? How can it be achieved then?

Vladimir Putin: Let me try to explain that. I have already said this many times, but if it needs to be repeated, I will. When we were holding talks in Istanbul, Türkiye, with the negotiators from the other side, we ended up having a thick folio, a document, which was actually a draft treaty. We have an excerpt from that treaty in the Presidential Executive Office; it was initialled by the head of the negotiating group on the Ukrainian side, Mr Arakhamia. You can see his signature on it. But then, as you already know, Mr Arakhamia himself publicly told the world – it was also at a meeting with journalists, I believe, even with foreign ones – that former Prime Minister of Great Britain Mr Johnson arrived and convinced them not to sign the treaty and, therefore, not to implement it. And so they started to bring up the topic you have just mentioned – we need to defeat Russia on the battlefield.

Are we ready to negotiate? We sure are. But we are definitely not ready for talks that are based on some kind of "wishful thinking" which comes after the use of psychotropic drugs, but we are ready for talks based on the realities that have developed, as they say in such cases, on the ground. This is the first thing.

Secondly, we have already been promised a lot of things many times before. We were promised that NATO would not expand to the East, but then we saw NATO at our borders. We were promised, without delving into history, that the internal conflict in Ukraine would be resolved by peaceful, political means. As we remember, three foreign ministers from Poland, Germany and France came to Kiev and promised that they would be guarantors of these agreements. One day later, the coup d'état took place. We were promised that the Minsk agreements would be honoured, and then they publicly announced that they never intended to fulfil their promises, instead they only took a pause to arm the Bandera regime in Ukraine. We were promised a lot of things, so that is why promises alone are not enough.

For us to hold negotiations now just because they are running out of ammunition would be ridiculous. Nevertheless, we are open to a serious discussion, and we are eager to resolve all conflicts, especially this one, by peaceful means. However, we must be sure that this is not just another pause that the enemy wants to use for rearmament, but rather a serious conversation with security guarantees for the Russian Federation.

We know various options that are being discussed, we know the "lures" they are going to show us in order to convince us that the time has come. Once again, we want to resolve all disputes and this particular dispute, this particular conflict, by peaceful means. And we are ready for that, we want that. But this should be a serious negotiation with provision of security for the opposing side, and in this case we are primarily interested in the security of the Russian Federation. That is what we will proceed from.

Dmitry Kiselev: Mr President, I am afraid we appear too generous, don't we? Wouldn't it be the case that we conclude another agreement with them and they will cheat us once again? And we will console ourselves with the thought that we did it all honestly and it was they who cheated. Are we doomed to always end up with egg on our face?

Back in the 1990s, the United States coined themselves medals for the victory in the Cold War, and the decades since that time have been the decades of great lies. How can we ever hope that they finally conclude an honest treaty with us and comply with it and give us guarantees? I do not know how we are to handle them. Do you really believe this is at all possible?

Vladimir Putin: I hate saying this, but I don't trust anyone.

Dmitry Kiselev: Well.

Vladimir Putin: But we need guarantees. These guarantees have to be put down on paper, and they should suit us and they should make us trust them. That is what I mean.

It would probably be premature to publicly say that it could be possible. But we certainly will not buy any empty promises.

Dmitry Kiselev: I am afraid your words might be cited and interpreted broadly. When you say that you don't trust anyone, do you mean that you trust nobody at all or do you refer to the Western partners in this particular case?

Vladimir Putin: I prefer to rely on the facts rather than be guided by wishful thinking and assurances that everybody can be trusted. You see, the responsibility

for the consequences of any decision of this magnitude is immense. For this reason we will do nothing that would prejudice the interests of our country.

Dmitry Kiselev: Mr President, what happened to Emmanuel Macron? Has he gone nuts? He is going to send French troops against our army. He looks like a fighting Gallic rooster and has scared all Europeans. How should one take it?

Vladimir Putin: In fact, the Western countries' military personnel have been present in Ukraine for a long time. They had been there before the coup d'état, and after the coup their number has grown several times. Today they are involved both directly as military advisers and as foreign mercenaries, and they suffer casualties. Yet I am certain that even if foreign countries are to send their troops officially, it will not change the situation on the ground – and this is the most important thing because arms supplies change nothing.

Second, it can lead to serious geopolitical consequences. If, say, Polish troops enter Ukrainian territory, allegedly for the protection of, say, the border between Belarus and Ukraine, or some other parts, to release Ukrainian troops and enable them to fight along the contact line, I think, Polish troops will stay there. That is what I believe. It is their heart's desire to get back the lands they have historically regarded as theirs, the lands that "Father of the Peoples" Joseph Stalin took from them and gave to Ukraine. They certainly want to have these lands back. So if Polish troops enter Ukraine, they will hardly ever leave it.

In such a case, this example might be followed by other countries that lost parts of their territories after the Second World War. I think that Ukraine would face geopolitical consequences – at least as regards preserving its current statehood – in their full and unappealing magnitude.

Dmitry Kiselev: Going back to Mr Macron, could he be revenging himself on Russia for having taken him down a peg or two in Africa instead of playing nice and obedient? He did not expect Russia to be so active, did he?

Vladimir Putin: Yes, I believe that might be a matter of some hard feelings, but when we maintained direct contacts with him we used to discuss this topic rather openly.

We have never thrust our way to Africa, neither have we squeezed France out of there. The problem has a different source. There is a well-known Wagner group, which initially pursued a number of economic projects in Syria and subsequently spread its activities to some other countries in Africa. It has enjoyed the support of the Ministry of Defence, but only because it is a Russian group, no more. We have not squeezed anybody out of Africa. Rather, the leaders of some African countries had dealings with some Russian economic players and wanted to work with them, rather than with the French ones, in some areas. This was not our, but our African friends' initiative.

So it is not clear, what we are to blame for in this connection, if an independent state wants to develop its ties with partners from other countries, including from Russia, wants to build its relations with Russia. We have not touched these former French colonists in those African countries. Without a touch of irony, many countries, for which France historically was a mother country, are very reluctant to deal with it. It is none of our fault. It might be more convenient to France to pin the blame on somebody else than to acknowledge its own faults. The French President's sharp and emotional reaction might be explained, among other things, by the developments in some African states.

However, I know that there are other African countries, those that have no objections against French presence and say that they are happy and ready to work with the French. Yet some countries are not. It is not our doing. We are not brainwashing anybody and not inciting any anti-French sentiments there.

We set ourselves no such tasks. To be frank, Russia has no state or national goals to pursue there. We merely maintain friendly ties. If they prefer to build their relations with Russia, they are most welcome, we reciprocate such steps. There is nothing to be offended with.

Dmitry Kiselev: But now they are saying in France that there are no longer any "red lines" left with regard to Russia, nothing is impossible and everything is possible. In general, they want to talk to us somehow on the basis of the balance of power. We hear a lot of things from France, from the West, and from Lithuania. In general, the chorus is not slender, but hostile.

Maybe we, too, should go for unconventional solutions and at some point seek help from the two-million-strong North Korean army? For example, in exchange for our "nuclear umbrella" over half of the Korean peninsula? Why not then?

Vladimir Putin: First of all, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has its own "nuclear umbrella." They didn't ask us for anything. That's the first point.

Second. In principle, based on what we see on the battlefield, we are coping with the tasks we set ourselves.

As for the states saying that they have no "red lines" with Russia, they should realise that Russia will have no "red lines" with them either.

As for small European states, first, we treat everyone with respect, no matter what. Second, when these small states call for toughening the policy towards Russia and taking some extreme measures, including, say, the deployment of troops and so on, they are still those states, and they understand this, which will not feel the consequences of their provocative statements. And those who may feel it, keep a low profile. And rightly so.

Dmitry Kiselev: And all that German dancing with the Taurus missiles? Mr Scholz says, "we do not supply," but there are forces that insist on sending the Taurus missiles to Ukraine, the British propose their initiative: let's do it via England, we are ready to send. The target is the Crimean Bridge, the German generals are already planning operations, as we have heard, not only targeting the Crimean Bridge, but also military bases, as they say, deep inside the Russian territory. Some are already saying these missiles could hit the Kremlin. Don't they go too far in their dreams?

Vladimir Putin: First, they are dreaming and cheering themselves up. Second, they are trying to intimidate us.

As for Germany, there are constitutional problems there as well. They are right when they say that if the Taurus missiles hit that part of the Crimean Bridge, which is certainly, even according to their concepts, part of the Russian territory, this is a violation of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The fact is that German opposition is behaving even more aggressively. We will see what they will agree on. We are following this closely. British and American missiles are also used. But this does not change the situation on the battlefield. Yes, they're causing damage to us, of course, that's obvious. But, in essence, it does not affect the course of hostilities and the consequences that are inevitable for the other side.

We are now hearing that in Germany – both your channels and foreign channels, German channels, show – how much they have, how much is in a bad state, how much requires improvement, modernisation, and so on. Let them work. As you have rightly said, there are things they should think about. Those who are smarter think about it.

Dmitry Kiselev: And the new NATO members, Finland and Sweden, in general, what did they trade for what? Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billström suddenly told the Turks that Sweden was against NATO bases on the Swedish territory. Didn't they realise what they had joined? What happened to them?

Vladimir Putin: You have to ask them, I don't know. We had quite good relations, stable relations with those countries, and I think that they benefited more from the fact that they adhered to neutrality, because it gave certain advantages, at least as a negotiating platform to reduce tension in Europe.

We had a perfect relationship with Finland, just perfect. We didn't have a single claim against each other, much less a territorial one, I am not talking about other areas. We didn't even have any troops there; we had removed everything from the Russian-Finnish border. Why did they do that? For purely political reasons, I think. I guess they really wanted to be a member of a Western club, under some kind of "umbrella." Why did they do that, I frankly don't understand. This is a totally senseless step in terms of safeguarding their own national interests. However, it's up to them to decide, and they made that decision.

We didn't have any troops there, now we will. There were no weapon systems, now there will be. Why? We had very good economic relations. They used our market, we bought a lot from them. What's wrong with that? Now the situation will change. Many of their goods are not really needed in other markets, and they're missing out on our goods. I don't understand it.

Dmitry Kiselev: Meanwhile, in the US, there's an ongoing...

Vladimir Putin: You know, it's an everyday thing, but still. In recent years, both in Helsinki, and even more so in the border areas of Finland, payments could be made in Russian rubles. In large supermarkets, including in Helsinki, you could buy any goods for rubles. All advertisements are in Russian there.

Dmitry Kiselev: People in border areas over there are simply going bankrupt.

Vladimir Putin: Well, what I mean to say is that, on the other hand, the economic situation was fine: house prices stood at a good level. Yes, this was fine in terms of the economy, yet there were apparently highly conservative right-wing, nationalist political actors who did not like these closer relations with Russia. Some even though it was too much: Russians buying houses and flats, signs in Russian everywhere around...

I mean I know for sure that this Russophobia started somewhere at the grassroots level. Perhaps some political movements in the country decided to make use of this bias – perhaps so. All those factors combined resulted in such a decision. That's what I think, but I cannot be 100 percent sure. Anyway, this won't help enhance security, either bilaterally or in Europe as a whole.

Dmitry Kiselev: Meanwhile, the United States finds itself amidst a fierce presidential race. And of course, they cannot do without you there. You are the invisible participant, because every Republican or Democratic candidate mentions you in their speech, giving reasons. It even seems that you never come off newspaper pages or TV news headlines and are always an argument in everyone's election campaign. You are even fuelling the fire.

Vladimir Putin: How is that?

Dmitry Kiselev: They say that we favour one candidate over others. If a foreign president says that one of the candidates in some other country is preferable, it is actually a textbook example of election-meddling. To which extent do you interfere in the American elections by claiming that we prefer to see Biden as president? And how true is that? What is that – some sort of trolling?

Vladimir Putin: Listen, first, I will tell you one thing that will prove that my preferences have not changed.

Second. We do not interfere in any elections in any way, and I have said more than once that we will work with any leader trusted by the American people, the American voter.

I find it curious that in his last year as president, Mr Trump, current candidate for president, rebuked me for sympathising with Mr Biden. It was more than four years ago. This is what he told me during one of our conversations, excuse me for a direct quote: "You want Sleepy Joe to win."

He told me that when he was still President. Later, to my surprise, he got persecuted for Russia allegedly having supported him as candidate. That's total rubbish.

As for the current situation with the elections, it is getting increasingly uncivilised. I wouldn't want to comment on that at all.

Besides, it is quite certain, I think that it is obvious to everyone now that the American political system cannot claim to be democratic in every sense of the word.

Dmitry Kiselev: To be honest, it sounds rather odd to me that you prefer Mr Biden. Back in 2011, Mr Biden came to Moscow and tried to dissuade you from running for president.

Do you remember that episode? He shared the story during his meeting with the Russian opposition at Spaso House. According to Garry Kasparov, Mr Biden said that he had visited Prime Minister Putin at the Russian White House in order to dissuade him from running for president, and that he had embarked on preparations for an "Arab" spring in our country. It seems that Biden did not favour you already at that time. You are engaged in a sort of historical duel. Or have you got over it?

Vladimir Putin: Honestly, I didn't pay much attention to that.

Dmitry Kiselev: You got over it, then. You even didn't pay much attention.

Vladimir Putin: A duel...

Dmitry Kiselev: So, it was serious for him but not for you.

Vladimir Putin: This is really a sign of interference...

Dmitry Kiselev: Yes, this is 100 percent blatant interference.

Vladimir Putin: ...Interference in the political processes in our country. We have stated, and I have stated many times: "We will not let anyone do it."

Dmitry Kiselev: Well then.

Leaving aside the interference and the electoral battles, the escalation in fact continues. It seems that both superpowers, Russia and the USA, are playing what the Americans call the "chicken game" (when chickens ram each other); it is a game in which two drivers head toward each other to see who swerves away first. None seems inclined to be the first so far. Is the crash imminent then?

Vladimir Putin: Why? The United States announced that they are not going to send troops. We know what American troops in the Russian territory are. These are invaders. That is how we will treat them even if they appear in the territory of Ukraine, and they understand it. I have said that Mr Biden is a representative of the traditional school and this is proved. Yet, apart from Mr Biden, they have enough specialists in Russian-American relations and strategic deterrence.

Therefore, I do not think that it is getting closer to a head-on collision. But we are ready for it. I have said many times that it is a matter of life and death for us, while for them it is a matter of improving their tactical position in the world on the whole as well as maintaining their status among their allies in Europe in particular. This is also important, but not as much as it is for us.

Dmitry Kiselev: It is interesting that you said we are ready for it. Philosopher and geopolitical expert Alexander Dugin directly urges to practically prepare for a nuclear war. "The better we are ready for it, the less likely such a war is," Mr Dugin states. How can you ever be prepared for it? Are we really ready for a nuclear war?

Vladimir Putin: From a military-technical point of view, we are certainly ready. They [the troops] are constantly on alert. This is the first thing.

Secondly. Our nuclear triad is more advanced than any other one, and this is also a universally recognised fact. We and the Americans are the only ones who have such a triad, actually.

Here, we have made a lot more progress. We have a more advanced nuclear component. On the whole, as for carriers and warheads, we have a rough parity, yet, the nuclear component we have is more sophisticated.

Everyone knows it, all experts do. However, it does not mean that we should compete by the number of carriers or warheads, but we should know about it. And I repeat that those who need it – experts, specialists, the military – are well aware of it.

Now they are setting the task to increase this modernity, novelty, they have relevant plans. We also know about them. They are developing all their components, so do we. But, in my view, this does not mean that they are ready to wage this nuclear war tomorrow. If they want to, what is there to do? We are ready.

Dmitry Kiselev: Perhaps, to make it more compelling, we should conduct nuclear tests at some stage? After all, we have no international restrictions for that.

Vladimir Putin: There is a treaty which bans such kind of tests, however, the United States has not ratified it, unfortunately. That is why to maintain parity we have withdrawn this ratification. Since the treaty was not ratified by the United States, it did not enter into force eventually, as it did not get the required number of ratifications, but we are nevertheless sticking to these agreements.

We are aware that the possibility of conducting such tests is being considered in the United States. This is due to the fact that, when new warheads appear, as some specialists believe, it is not enough to test them on computer which means that they should be tested for real as well. Such ideas are in the air in some US circles, they exist, and we are aware of them.

And we are also watching. If they conduct such tests, we will not necessarily do it, we should think whether we need it or not, however, I do not rule out that we can do the same.

Dmitry Kiselev: But are we ready for it in a technical way?

Vladimir Putin: We are always ready. I want to make it clear that these are not conventional weapons, this is the kind of troops which are always on alert.

Dmitry Kiselev: Mr President, last year, when there were tough moments at the front in connection with Kharkov or Kherson, were you thinking of tactical nuclear weapons?

Vladimir Putin: What for? The decision to withdraw troops from Kherson was taken at the suggestion of the then command of the grouping. But it did not mean at all that our front was falling apart there. Nothing like that ever happened. It was just done to avoid unnecessary casualties among the personnel. That is all. This was the main motive, as under the conditions of warfare when it was impossible to fully supply the grouping located on the right bank, we would simply suffer unnecessary losses of personnel. Because of this, it was decided to redeploy them to the left bank.

The correctness of this decision was confirmed by what the Ukrainian command tried to do in certain areas on the left bank, including in Krynki: they were just throwing their personnel there as if it were a meat grinder. They were running around literally barefoot in the end. They were trying to deliver ammunition there using speedboats and drones. What is that? Just slaughter, they sent them for slaughter.

I once asked the Chief of the General Staff, there is nothing secret about it, "In your opinion, who takes the decisions on that side? As the one who is taking the decision understands that he is sending people to certain death?" He answered, "They understand." I said, "But who is taking the decision, why are they doing it? It makes no sense." – "It makes no military sense." I said, "What sense does it make?" – "I do not know", he answered, "probably, top political leadership, based on political considerations that they have some chance to break through our defence, some chance to get additional money, referring to the fact that they have some bridgehead on the left bank, some chance to present their position at international meetings in a good way." The command was given, and all the subordinate heads automatically pass it on further.

By the way, the prisoners that were taken captive there, laid down arms, they show they didn't even know what situation they were getting into. Let's say new forces are moved there and told, "There is a solid defence there, go on, continue, and help." They couldn't even get to the left bank anymore.

Dmitry Kiselev: A tragedy.

Vladimir Putin: A real tragedy. From a human viewpoint, absolutely.

So, why do we need to use weapons of mass destruction? There has never been such a need.

Dmitry Kiselev: That is to say such idea did not even occur to you?

Vladimir Putin: No. What for? Weapons exist to be used. We have our own principles; what do they say? That we are ready to use weapons, including the ones you have just mentioned, when it is about the existence of the Russian state, about harming our sovereignty and independence. We have everything spelled out in our Strategy. We have not changed it.

Dmitry Kiselev: Mr President, when the outgoing President Yeltsin suggested that you should run for President your first reaction was, "I am not ready."

Vladimir Putin: Exactly, this is the direct speech.

Dmitry Kiselev: Since then you have, of course, gone through a great evolution. If you are to write a telegram to yourself to that time, what text would be in it?

Vladimir Putin: You know, this is like "A [Connecticut] Yankee in King Arthur's Court" or something like that. It is not possible to answer this question because the question was posed at that time, within the historical and economic context the country was in, in that internal political situation from the viewpoint of internal security. And all this together prompted me to the answer that I gave, "I am not ready for this." Not because I was afraid of something but because the scale of the tasks was enormous and the number of problems grew every day like a snowball. That is why I said sincerely and not because, I repeat, I was afraid of something but because I thought that I was not ready to solve all these problems, God forbid, I would do something even worse. That's what I meant. That is why I was absolutely sincere and, if I went back, I would say the same thing again.

Dmitry Kiselev: And what was decisive then? You ran after all.

Vladimir Putin: Probably, conversations with Boris Nikolayevich.

The key thing was that in the end he said to me then, "Well, ok, I understand, we'll come back to this later." And we came back to this several times.

In the long run he said that I was a man of experience, knew what I was doing, what I was suggesting, and told me some other things. Perhaps, it is not appropriate to talk myself up but he said such positive words. Later he repeated it again, in a genuinely positive way; I am not going to talk about it now.

And when the work started, everything was completely different there. You know, when you work, you think: this, this and this is needed right now, this – tomorrow – and so on and so forth. When you settle down to a task, it's a different ball game.

Dmitry Kiselev: No time to be afraid of anymore.

Vladimir Putin: It's not about being afraid of but about being up to the task, being able to address them. You remember yourself what the year 1999 was like in the economy, in the security sphere, in the finance – in everything.

Dmitry Kiselev: You once said that preparing to enter Leningrad University was a turning point for you. This was the situation when you had to risk it all, knowing that either you do it now and cope and then be able to implement the plans that you had (and at that time you were already planning to work for the KGB) or you lose, and then everything is different and there is no chance. Is Russia now in the same situation when it has to risk it all?

Vladimir Putin: First, I was not in such situation then. Yes, I wanted to work in the state security agencies.

Dmitry Kiselev: The admission itself, it was kind of momentous, this feeling, wasn't it? It's either this way or that?

Vladimir Putin: Not exactly. I just came to the reception desk and said, "I would like to work here. What do I need for this?"

The alternative was simple, I was told: you need to either get a higher education, and preferably a law degree, or serve in the army, or have at least three years of work experience but better serve in the army. If I hadn't enrolled at the university, I would have joined the army.

Well, perhaps, this would have been a longer way to the goal I set myself but it was there after all. There is always an alternative.

Dmitry Kiselev: But you entered with tension.

Vladimir Putin: Yes, of course, because after all, I studied at a school with a chemical and mathematical bias but here I had to take humanitarian subjects. I had to leave one thing and do another.

Yes, certainly, there was tension. I had to learn a foreign language on my own, specifically German, I had to study history, literature and so on.

Dmitry Kiselev: Russia is currently also at the crossroads: either everything works out or...

Vladimir Putin: Russia is not at the crossroads. It is on the strategic path of its development and will not deviate from its path.

Dmitry Kiselev: To what extent do you feel the support of Russian society in its new quality? After all, a new quality of Russian society has emerged.

Vladimir Putin: It was there, it just manifested itself. And it is very good that we have given this profound Russian society an opportunity to express itself. I have the feeling that people have been waiting for this for a long time, that an average person would be in demand by the country and the state, and that the fate of the country would depend on him. It is this feeling of inner connection with the Motherland, with the Fatherland, of one's importance in solving key tasks, in this case in the sphere of security, that has raised to the surface the strength of the Russian and other peoples of Russia.

Dmitry Kiselev: Does that recharge you?

Vladimir Putin: Always. It's not even a matter of someone being recharged, it's a matter of seeing the demands of society. This is the most important thing – to meet the demands of society.

Dmitry Kiselev: But it is time to recognise that you play a key role not only in Russia, but also in the world, because billions of people associate with you the hope

for international justice, for the defence of human dignity, for the protection of traditional values. How does it feel to feel that level of responsibility?

Vladimir Putin: To tell you the truth, I don't feel it at all. I am simply working in the interests of Russia, in the interests of our people. Yes, I understand what you are saying now, and I am ready to comment on it. But I don't feel like I'm some sort of master of the world's destinies. Believe me, nothing even close. I am just doing my duty to Russia and to our people, who consider Russia their Motherland.

As for other countries of the world, the way we are treated around the world is very closely related to this. That's what is interesting. It is a phenomenon, that's for sure.

What I would like to draw attention to. You are absolutely right here, many people in the world are looking at us, at what is happening in our country and in our struggle for our interests.

That's what I think is important. Why is this happening? Not because we are formally members of BRICS or because we have some kind of traditional relations with Africa. This is also important, but the point, in my opinion, is quite different. The point is that this so-called "golden billion" has been practically parasitising on other peoples for centuries, 500 years. They tore apart the unfortunate peoples of Africa, they exploited Latin America, they exploited the countries of Asia, and of course no one has forgotten that. I have the feeling that it is not even the leadership of these countries, although it is very important, but the ordinary citizens of these countries feel in their hearts what is happening.

They associate our struggle for our independence and true sovereignty with their aspirations for their own sovereignty and independent development. But this is aggravated by the fact that there is a very strong desire in Western elites to freeze the current unjust state of affairs in international affairs. They've spent centuries filling their bellies with human flesh and their pockets with money. But they must realise that the vampire ball is ending.

Dmitry Kiselev: Are you alluding to their, as you put it in your Address, colonial manners? That's what you're saying.

Vladimir Putin: That's the way it goes.

Dmitry Kiselev: But now you have painted a perfectly fair picture of people seeing some hope in Russia. How is it that Western propaganda, with all its power, its colossal resources and tools, has failed to banish Russia, isolate it and create a false image of it, although it strived to do so in the heads of billions of people? How did that happen?

Vladimir Putin: Because what I just said is more important to people. People all over the world feel it in their hearts. They don't even need any pragmatic explanations for what is happening.

Dmitry Kiselev: You mean despite the wave of this dirt?

Vladimir Putin: Yes. In their own countries they also deceive people, and it has an effect. They – in many countries – believe that this is in their interests because they don't want to have such a huge country like Russia on their borders. The largest in the world in terms of territory, the largest in Europe in terms of population – not such a large population in the global dimension, not comparable to China or India, but the largest in Europe – and now also the fifth largest economy in the world. What do they need such a competitor for? They think: no, it is better, as some American specialists have suggested, to divide it into three, four, or five parts – it will be better for everyone. They proceed from that.

And part of, at least, Western elites, blinded by their Russophobia, were delighted when they brought us to the line after which our attempts to stop the war unleashed by the West in Ukraine in 2014 by force began, when we switched to conducting a special military operation. They even rejoiced, I think. Because they believed that now they would finish us off, now, under this barrage of sanctions, practically a sanctions war declared against us, with the help of Western weapons and war through Ukrainian nationalists, they would finish off Russia. Hence the slogan: "To inflict a strategic defeat on Russia on the battlefield".

But later came the realisation that it was unlikely, and still later – that it was impossible. And they came to understand that instead of a strategic defeat, they are faced with powerlessness, a powerlessness despite the fact that they were relying on the might of the all-powerful United States. They felt frustrated seeing the unity of the Russian people, the fundamentals of the Russian financial and economic system and its sustainability, and before the growing capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.

It was then that they – those who are slightly smarter than others – started to think that the policy towards the Russian Federation has to be changed. It was then that the idea to resume the negotiation process, to find ways to end this conflict, to search for where real interests of Russia lie, appeared. These people are dangerous, by the way, because it is easier to handle people who are guided by such basic urges.

Do you remember what our ancestors used to say? What the day-to-day happiness for many people was? To be full, drunk and with one's nose in tobacco. Right? It is easier to deal with such people when they are full, drunk, in other words, you have eaten and drunk enough. "Nose in tobacco" means they used snuff tobacco. Now it is more like "nose in cocaine." It is all the same, though, such people are just easier to deal with. As for smart people, it's different. Such people are more dangerous because they influence people's minds, including in our society. They will be offering their own wants and wishes as some sort of "lures" for us.

You already emphasised it when you asked about the possibility of negotiations. But still. This is the root of the disagreement within the Western society. This is clear, we can see this.

We are not going to cause divisions. They will manage to do it brilliantly on their own. However, we are going, without any doubt, to make sure our interests are met.

Dmitry Kiselev: I cannot but ask. These attacks on the Belgorod and Kursk regions are military action going on in our regions. They act bolder. Do they feel something? What's causing this?

Vladimir Putin: The explanation is very simple. This is happening against the backdrop of setbacks at the line of contact, at the front line. They achieved none of the goals they had set last year. What is more, our Armed Forces have fully regained the initiative now. Everybody knows this, everybody admits this. I think I will say nothing new in this regard. They have to demonstrate at least something given the setbacks. Mainly, they want to focus the attention on how the situation is represented in the media.

The enemy attempted to attack our state borders with subversive groups, first and foremost. The latest report of the General Staff says something up to 300 people, including foreign mercenaries. The enemy's losses amounted to more than 200 people, around 230. The enemy lost seven tanks out of eight that they used, nine armoured vehicles out of nine, seven of them made in the United States, they are

Bradleys. They used other armoured vehicles as well, but mainly for the transportation of the personnel: they drove them to the site, dropped them and left immediately. That is what happens at the border with Belgorod. A little southwards if I am not mistaken, in a particular place, less people are involved. Nevertheless, the main goal – I have no doubts about this – is if not to disrupt the elections in Russia, then at least to hinder the normal course of citizens' expressing their will. This is the first thing.

The second thing. It is the information effect, as I have said.

The third thing. It is their wish to obtain anything, a chance, an argument or leverage in a potential future negotiation process: we will return you this, you will return us that.

But I have said that it is easier to talk to people who are guided by the approach "full, drunk and with their nose in you-know-what" because one can anticipate what these people are going to do next. They will also attempt something similar in other areas as well but we see through them.

Dmitry Kiselev: We mentioned the incident when you saved children from the fire. You already have grandchildren. What kind of country would you like to leave to your grandchildren?

Vladimir Putin: You know, we have to achieve everything that was stated in the Address to the Federal Assembly several days ago as a first step. We have big plans. They are very specific in economic and social spheres, as well as in supporting mothers, children, families with children, the elderly. We rarely talk about it these days, or do not talk at all, yet we always allocate appropriate resources for this as well. It includes indexation of pensions, various benefits, long-term care for people who need it.

I would like to say that it's thanks to the elderly people that today we have a strong and stable statehood and economy, among other things. That is why, despite all the upheavals and direst trials our economy went through in the 1990s, it pulled through thanks to their heroic labour after the Great Patriotic War and during the economic revival. That is why we must never forget about this, about the achievements of the previous generations. We must always remember it while ensuring appropriate well-being for them. The future is in our children, that is why I have mentioned programmes to support mothers and children.

All this can be achieved only on the basis of the economy. I expect it to become more technologically advanced, modern, and be based on the achievements of science and technology, information technology, artificial intelligence, robotics, genetics and do on. Our agriculture is developing at fantastic rates. It also needs up-to-date technologies. They are actively used and will continue to be used moving forward.

Of course, the country will be self-sufficient in ensuring its security and defence. Together, we will have to multiply all of that to secure our future.

Dmitry Kiselev: Thank you, Mr President. Your confidence inspires. I wish you success in your noble pursuits.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you.

Dmitry Kiselev: Thank you.

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