

Vladimir Putin**Western leaders defend liberal values after Putin attack**

Donald Tusk and Theresa May issue statements rebuffing remarks



Theresa May remains impassive as she shakes Vladimir Putin's hand in Osaka, Japan

Alex Barker in Osaka and Henry Foy in Moscow JUNE 28, 2019

Theresa May and her likely successor Boris Johnson attacked Vladimir Putin over his claim in a Financial Times interview that liberalism had become “obsolete”, rebuffing his suggestion of a rapprochement in UK-Russia relations.

In the interview the Russian president raised the prospect of a restoration of ties, which have been frozen since the attempted murder last year of former Russian agent Sergei Skripal.

But Mrs May spoke out against Russia’s “irresponsible” and “despicable” behaviour when they met on the sidelines of the G20 summit, avoiding eye contact with Mr Putin when they shook hands.

A Downing Street spokesperson said Mrs May told the president “there cannot be a normalisation of our bilateral relationship until Russia stops the irresponsible and destabilising activity that threatens the UK and its allies”.

Mr Putin’s assertion that liberalism was a spent force was criticised by Mr Johnson — the favourite to succeed Mrs May as leader of the Conservative party when she steps down at the end of July.

He said the Russian president was “totally wrong . . . our values, freedom and democracy, the rule of law, free speech, those things are imperishable and they will succeed”.

The Russian president told the Financial Times [in an interview](#) on Thursday that values such as multiculturalism, open borders and social tolerance were no longer accepted by the majority of

people, and had “outlived their purpose”. Mr Putin also praised US president Donald Trump for responding to the views of voters who had rejected some of those values.

“[Liberals] cannot simply dictate anything to anyone just like they have been attempting to do over the recent decades,” [Mr Putin said](#).

The powerful attack on values that have underpinned western democracies since 1945 aligned the Russian president with several national populists and anti-establishment movements that have surged to power in the west in recent years. Some of those movements have been suspected of receiving support from Moscow.

Donald Tusk, the European Council president, and Mrs May, both issued statements rebuffing his remarks.

“I was able to read the whole interview with President Putin in the Financial Times,” said Mr Tusk, who saw a populist resurgence in his native Poland knock the liberal party that he led out of office in 2015. “I have to say that I strongly disagree with the main argument that liberalism is obsolete. We are here as Europeans also to firmly and unequivocally defend and promote liberal democracy.”

At his bilateral meeting with Mr Putin, Mr Trump jokingly warned the Russian president not to meddle in US elections. Mr Putin had earlier told the FT that “Donald” was “a talented person . . . [who] saw changes in American society, and he took advantage of this”.

In the 90-minute interview with the FT, Mr Putin echoed nationalist populists such as Hungary’s Viktor Orban, Italy’s Matteo Salvini and France’s Marine Le Pen, in attacking liberal governments for pursuing what he described as a mindless embrace of multiculturalism and, among other things, sexual diversity.

“Some things do appear excessive to us. They claim now that children can play five or six gender roles,” he said.

Mrs May said in a statement that the UK “would continue to unequivocally defend liberal democracy and protect the human rights and equality of all groups, including LGBT people”.

Additional reporting by Jim Pickard in London

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