

**13 August 2008**

## **Dimbleby talks of the absurdity of Georgia “poking the backside of the Russian Bear”**

Journalist, broadcaster and author Jonathan Dimbleby spoke of his fascinating 10,000 mile journey across Russia in front of a capacity audience at the Edinburgh International Book Festival today.

He spoke of feeling daunted before the journey, having been brought up with the conviction that Russia was the adversary and a difficult place to travel. He said “Russia is filled with torment and filled with extremes. When meeting people it was difficult to get through the carapace of surface hostility without drinking my own body weight in vodka.”

He touched on the current situation in Georgia, saying the President of Georgia had a great deal to answer for – and talked of the absurdity of Georgia taking a penknife and poking the backside of the Russian bear. He said “Saakashvili was in position but in not in power, Putin was always in power.” He continued “Russia is a kleptocracy, a country run by a gang, a clan, a clique. The media is muzzled and it is the third most dangerous country in the world for national journalists after Iraq and Burma” adding that the western world needs to realise “how deep the autocratic rule has riven deep into the soul of Russia with the consent of the majority”. He commented that Stalin regarded Ivan the Terrible as his hero, Putin was originally quoted as taking Peter the Great as his hero, but seems to have changed to Stalin.

He added that Putin appears to have brought a sense of security to Russia in the way that there was a sense of security in Stalin’s time, contrasting with the deep insecurity brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union. He was scathing about Boris Yeltsin saying “Yeltsin was responsible for Putin – and Putin is not good news”, but believed Gorbachev was one of the great men of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – and it was an act of great statesmanship to liberate Eastern Europe, although it will take a long time for Russia to see and understand that.

Asked about the revival of religion in the country he talked about the Russian Church which he thinks has revived nationalism which verges on dangerous xenophobia and believes that the Church will endorse wholeheartedly the Russian intervention in Georgia. “The Church suborned to the Tsar, and suborned to the Soviet and has now aligned itself to Putin’s state. The Patriarch advised the faithful to vote for Putin in the recent parliamentary elections.”

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# Press Release

9 - 25 August 2008, Charlotte Square Gardens, Edinburgh.

[www.edbookfest.co.uk](http://www.edbookfest.co.uk)

The Book Festival continues until Monday 25 August with talks from Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond, three times Booker Prize winner, and 2008 Booker Nominee Salman Rushdie and in a world first, Vietnamese Author Nam Le, will be beamed live to Charlotte Square from the Melbourne Writers' Festival in Australia. Full details of all the events can be found on [www.edbookfest.co.uk](http://www.edbookfest.co.uk).

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