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**Freedom is your own ‘feeling of fighting for yourself’,
says Pussy Riot’s Maria Alyokhina at the Edinburgh International Book Festival**

Freedom is not about being in prison or outside of prison, according to Maria Alyokhina of Russian feminist protest punk rock group Pussy Riot. “Freedom is not about prison at all,” she said, at a sold-out event at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. “It’s your own feeling of fighting for yourself, and it doesn’t matter what conditions you are in—inside prison walls, or in British [Public] school.”

Alyokhina was speaking today with Yanis Varoufakis, the former Greek Minister of Finance and co-founder of the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25). She was talking primarily about *Riot Days* - her account of Pussy Riot’s extraordinary rise to infamy in 2012 - despite being officially banned from leaving Russia. As Varoufakis pointed out, Alyokhina “doesn’t know what’s going to happen to her when she goes back home. And I think that should really humble the rest of us ‘armchair revolutionaries’.”

Alyokhina, who admitted she was “not sure if I’ve grown up,” felt her story “should be told and heard” but didn’t want to write “something like [Aleksandr] Solzhenitsyn wrote, because not so many people can read it. I believe that in each life, each fate, everybody has this choice; to stay inside, away from what is going on, or to do something. And this [book] is for doing; it’s a very practical guide for ‘doing’.”

When asked by audience member about whether she feared for herself or her family back in Russia, she said: “I don’t like all these ‘ifs’—what will happen to me ‘if’ I do this action, for example. If you think like that you will never do anything.”

Aware of Edinburgh’s connection with J K Rowling’s Harry Potter novels, she added: “Do you remember what it was about the fear of monsters there? Just do not allow them to grow, and if they grow, you should

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just make fun of them. I think fear is a quite useless thing. What you do, this matters. The important thing is to ‘do’, to overcome yourself.”

Asked whether she supported any particular economic model for Russia, the singer and activist admitted it was hard for her to think of alternatives, given that she only experienced 10 years of freedom and democracy between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the election of Putin. “Maybe in the future I can write this kind of manifesto,” she said, “but when you see how people are dying, you think firstly of saving life.”

Current protests in Russian cities across the country are largely dominated by teenagers, many of whom inspired by Pussy Riot’s own story.

“It doesn’t matter who you are; it doesn’t matter which country you are from. If you want to do something, just do,” she told her audience. “Yes, we are living in a country where you can be jailed for this, but it’s not the end of the world. For me, it’s not a reason to stop.”

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