

Luzhkov Goes on Attack in Closed Lecture

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Former Mayor Yury Luzhkov gave a harsh critique of the country's political system Thursday, calling his former United Russia party a Kremlin "servant" and lambasting the president's "dictatorial" power to dismiss governors.

"I am not going to run for any post in 2011, it's useless," Luzhkov told students at the Russian State Trade and Economic University, Interfax reported.

"There are no elections to the State Duma today," he said. "As for presidential elections, that's not something I'm considering. I think it's out of place to talk about being a candidate."

The ousted mayor also warned that he was not calling on supporters to protest his dismissal, but only to "comprehend" the implications of the Kremlin's dominance over Russian politics.

The speech was supposed to be open to reporters, but Luzhkov later asked that no press be

admitted, Interfax reported. Planned broadcasts online and by closed circuit television were also canceled.

Luzhkov, a founding member of United Russia, said he had always taken a "critical attitude" toward the party, but that he ultimately decided to quit it because of their subservient role.

"I often told party chairman Boris Gryzlov that we don't have discussions. We are always taking orders from the administration," said Luzhkov, referring later to Gryzlov's famous gaffe that "parliament is no place for discussion."

The party has become a "servant," he added, echoing Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin, who often used the term to describe anti-Bolshevist parties.

United Russia almost immediately responded to the criticism by saying party members do not consider Luzhkov a founder — despite his central role in creating the party and nearly a decade as one of its senior leaders.

Alexei Chesnakov, head of the party's public council, said United Russia "serves the interests of the people and not the individual politicians," Interfax reported.

United Russia was founded "with the active participation of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev," he added.

Stanislav Belkovsky, an independent political analyst, said the claim was ridiculous and that Medvedev "had very little or nothing to do with founding" the party. Chesnakov "acts like ... he doesn't care about his own reputation or the reputation of his party," he said.

Medvedev is not a United Russia member and was never a part of its two main founding parties. When United Russia was formed, Medvedev was first deputy chief of Putin's administration.

Putin has also never joined United Russia but is officially its chairman, while Gryzlov is chairman of its supreme council.

Luzhkov previously told the liberal New Times magazine that he would head a movement to bring back gubernatorial elections in the country, abolished by then-President Putin in 2004. But Thursday's speech marked his harshest rhetoric since being ousted.

Moscow's mayor of 18 years also made his first public comments about his successor, Sergei Sobyenin, who was inaugurated Thursday after being relieved of his posts as a deputy prime minister and chief of staff to Putin.

In response to a student's question, Luzhkov declined to comment on his attitude toward Sobyenin or "everything happening today" but then added that he wished his replacement success, Gazeta.ru reported.

The lecture was Luzhkov's second public speech as ex-mayor. On Wednesday, he gave a lecture in his new post as a professor for the development of large cities at Moscow International University, headed by his predecessor and friend, Gavriil Popov.

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