

# United Russia Gets Right to Use Putin's Face

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January 24, 2011

**The  Moscow Times**

President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have given United Russia the exclusive right to use their portraits in the run-up to the State Duma and presidential elections, drawing scorn from other parties Monday.

United Russia heavily relies on its association with Putin and Medvedev, both of whom have steadfastly refused to become party members. Putin only in 2008 accepted the post of party chairman, while Medvedev has occasionally criticized it for stifling political competition.

United Russia secretary Sergei Neverov said the decision to let the party use their portraits reflects trust from both leaders. "This shows that they see us as the political force that carries out both the president's and the prime minister's course," Neverov said in a [statement](#) on the party's web site.

Other parties say otherwise. Gennady Gudkov, a senior State Duma deputy for A Just Russia, a

left-leaning pro-Kremlin party, said United Russia was nothing without Putin and Medvedev.

"This is the only argument they have," he said by telephone.

"This just confirms them as the party of power," said Gregory Bovt, co-founder of the pro-business, pro-Kremlin Right Cause party.

The decision to provide United Russia with exclusive use of the leaders' portraits comes as the country enters a crucial election period, including polls in 12 regions on March 13 and a Duma vote in December. Putin and Medvedev have left open the question of who will run in the presidential election in March 2012.

Putin has allowed his name to be used in United Russia campaigning in the past.

Meanwhile, Gudkov said A Just Russia planned a protest rally outside the Justice Ministry over the ministry's refusal to register a pro-modernization movement under the name "Go Russia."

Gudkov announced the formation of the movement last fall, prompting United Russia to form a similar group under the same name.

Shortly thereafter, Putin officially authorized United Russia's movement to use the word "Russia."

The Justice Ministry in December refused to register A Just Russia's movement, Gudkov said, adding that the ministry's reasoning for its decision was "unconvincing."

He said the rally was planned for next week after the ministry refused to allow one this coming Thursday.

"We applied this morning, only to be told that we had breached the three-day notice period. Apparently, some of our bureaucrats cannot even count," he said.

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