

Embattled Charity Denies Ties to Putin

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A former Kremlin official sought to distance himself from Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Wednesday in an apparent effort to shield Putin from a charity fund-raising scandal that threatens to embarrass him.

Vladimir Kiselyov, who co-organized a star-studded concert to assist ill children in December, also declared that the event had raised money on behalf of the children and helped purchase equipment for several children's hospitals.

The two statements, made on Dozhd radio, appeared to contradict earlier statements by Kiselyov's charity and by Putin's own spokesman.

Kiselyov is under fire after it emerged that his charity, Federation, has failed to donate any funds or equipment to assist ill children three months after the concert. Putin played the piano and sang a song in English at the St. Petersburg event, which was also attended by movie stars Gerard Depardieu, Sharon Stone and Kevin Costner.

Kiselyov, a St. Petersburg native who worked in the Kremlin's property department during Putin's presidency and before that reportedly raised campaign funds for Putin's mentor, St. Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak, said Wednesday that he did not recall ever meeting Putin.

"We lived in the same city, so maybe we took the same tram sometime," Kiselyov said.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov, however, said earlier this week that the prime minister "has never hidden the fact that he knows Kiselyov." Peskov also said Federation officials had offered Putin certain assurances about the scandal that had "calmed his fears."

Kiselyov made a videotaped statement before the charity concert that promised equipment for hospitals and money for ill children. But a Federation representative said Monday that the only thing the organization had intended to raise at the event was global awareness for ill Russian children.

The scandal broke after the mother of an ill child told President Dmitry Medvedev via his Twitter page last week that no hospitals had benefited from the concert.

Gerard Depardieu last month presented a Moscow children's hospital with equipment for its intensive care unit, the facility's head, Anatoly Kagan, [told](#) RIA-Novosti. He could not say whether Federation had anything to do with it.

Federation organized an event at another Moscow children's hospital in February, with Depardieu and actor Konstantin Khabensky presenting the patients with toys and equipment, the hospital's acting head, Nikolai Murzin, told The Moscow Times on Wednesday.

But a Moscow oncology center that Federation asked to provide a list of needed equipment only received "a handful of toys," center representatives [told](#) Gazeta.ru.

It remained unclear how much money the concert actually raised. Kiselyov did not comment on this or on reports that seats at the event were sold for up to 1 million rubles (\$35,000) each.

Dmitry Gryzlov, son of State Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov, confirmed the prices in an interview with Novaya Gazeta. But he [added](#) that Federation representatives offered to drop the price for him to 50,000 rubles (\$1,700) after he balked at the 1 million rubles.

Dmitry Gryzlov, who ended up attending the concert, said Deputy Justice Minister Viktor Yevtukhov and Zenit goalkeeper Viktor Malafeyev were among the guests.

Novaya Gazeta reported that a charity group backed by Boris Gryzlov and Senator Andrei Khazin, among others, was behind the Federation foundation.

But Mikhail Cherkasov, president of the charity group Center for Support of Socially Oriented Programs, told The Moscow Times that the report was a mix-up and his organization has nothing to do with Federation, whose founding organization simply has a similar-sounding name.

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