

Putin Gets Head Start on Duma Questions

By [Nikolaus von Twickel](#)

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Boris Gryzlov speaking at an earlier United Russia meeting. According to Gryzlov, the April 20 debate promises to be "long and detailed" because Putin will be given unlimited speaking time. **Igor Tabakov**

When State Duma deputies ask the prime minister about his annual report later this month, Vladimir Putin will know 23 of the 32 questions beforehand, his spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday.

Each of the four Duma factions may ask Putin eight questions — five of them written and three of them spoken — after his April 20 report. All written questions will officially be sent to the government after being approved by the lower chamber's council, Peskov told Interfax.

He added that the prime minister will also know in advance the three spoken questions from United Russia, the ruling party that is headed by Putin himself.

This leaves nine questions from the three oppositional factions — A Just Russia, Liberal Democrats and the Communists — that Putin will answer "not knowing them in advance," Peskov was quoted as saying.

A Just Russia, a left-leaning party created with the Kremlin's backing, and the ultranationalist Liberal Democrats tend to toe the government line, leaving the Communists as the only substantial parliamentary opposition and so the most likely to ask unpleasant questions.

The Duma council approved the written questions Thursday, the chamber's speaker Boris Gryzlov [said](#) in comments published on United Russia's web site.

Gryzlov also promised that the April 20 debate would be "long and detailed" because Putin will be given unlimited speaking time.

Some pundits voiced hopes that Putin could use the report for a major program speech that might even throw light on his plans for the 2012 presidential election.

"We might hear the first bits from a radically renewed strategy 2020," Dmitry Badovsky, a political scientist at Moscow State University, wrote in a Vedomosti [article](#) published Thursday.

Strategy 2020 is a vague blueprint for continued economic growth and diversification, promoted by United Russia.

Badovsky added that Putin might even demand from deputies a vote of confidence for his government.

Observers have expressed increasing frustration about the political uncertainty resulting from the fact that both Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev have left open who will run in the presidential vote next March.

However, Stanislav Belkovsky, an independent political analyst, predicted that both will leave the public guessing for a while and that the prime minister's report will be boring.

"It will be totally technical and uninteresting," he told The Moscow Times.

Nobody should expect anything like a presidential campaign to begin soon, simply because there is no need for it, Belkovsky said.

"For a real campaign, there needs to be real democratic elections, but everybody knows there are no democratic elections in this country," he said.

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