

Gorbachev Opposes Putin Bid

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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HANOVER, Germany — Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev said Prime Minister Vladimir Putin shouldn't seek a third term as president as the country struggles to develop democratic institutions.

Members of Putin's inner circle, many from his hometown of St. Petersburg, have sought to centralize power to protect their own interests, Gorbachev said this week in an interview. Some have even advocated dictatorship, he said in Hanover, where he attended a forum on improving German-Russian relations.

"If you try to do everything in the country without taking the people into account, while imitating democracy, that will lead to a situation like in Africa where leaders sit and rule for 20 or 30 years," Gorbachev said. "The Petersburg project in Russia is over. It has run its course."

Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev have left open the possibility that they may run for the top job next year. The next president may serve until 2024 after the term was increased to six

years.

"It would be better" if Putin chose not to seek a return to the Kremlin, Gorbachev said. "If I were in his place, I wouldn't run for president."

Medvedev, a one-time law professor, has had a difficult presidency because he came to power with limited experience in government, Gorbachev said.

As president, Medvedev should have spoken out about policies that reduced democracy, such as the elimination of direct elections for regional governors and single-seat districts for the lower house of parliament, Gorbachev said. Both changes were implemented during Putin's presidency.

"More than anything else, I'm worried about our electoral system, how they're whittling it away," he said. "It reminds me of when we were in school and there was the joke about someone balancing an uneven chair by slightly sawing down one leg and then another until there are no legs left."

Russia will continue on its path toward democracy as a new generation replaces "the worst, most amoral, most cynical" generation trained by the Soviet system, Gorbachev said.

"Democracy needs democratization everywhere, the world over, and that's difficult."

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