

Yaroslavl Awaits September Forum

By [Howard Amos](#)

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Volunchunas and the city emblem, which signifies strength and foresight. **Howard Amos**

YAROSLAVL — Yaroslavl is gearing up to host its third annual international political forum, which is rapidly becoming a regular fall event driven by President Dmitry Medvedev.

Entitled "the modern state in an era of social diversity," this year's forum will host not only Medvedev, but German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Turkish President Abdullah Gul and former Latvian President Valdis Zatlers.

"The forum is important for Yaroslavl and for our state as a whole," Mayor Viktor Volunchunas told The Moscow Times.

"We will clean up the town, maintain its green finery and its attractiveness — our girls are smiling, and the population is very much looking forward to it," he said.

More than 500 people are expected for the event, which will take place Sept. 7 and 8. Yaroslavl is 250 kilometers northeast of Moscow.

The forum is organized by the Institute for Public Planning, the Institute of Contemporary Development — Medvedev's main think tank — and Yaroslavl's Demidov State University. The executive in charge of managing the set-piece event is Vladislav Inozemtsev, director of the Center for Post-Industrial Studies.

In May, Inozemtsev said during a conference in China that the Yaroslavl forum will be "dedicated above all to what in the West is called 'multiculturalism' and the crisis of that [type of] politics."

Referring to the "social diversity" title of the conference, Volunchunas stressed that there is a plethora of different nationalities in Yaroslavl.

"Yaroslavl is a multinational city. ... Here there are Tartars, Uzbeks, Azeris, Kyrgyz, Belarussians, Ukrainians, Kazakhs, Germans, Englishmen and Jews," he said.

But weakness of the multicultural model has been much lamented in Russia. The head of the International Committee of the Federation Council, Mikhail Margelov, said Wednesday that one of the fundamental reasons behind recent rioting in London was the "death of multiculturalism."

In a conversation with religious leaders about his All-Russia People's Front in July, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said that "besides Russia, our citizens have no other motherland," RIA-Novosti reported.

At the Yaroslavl forum in 2010, Medvedev hosted Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and French Prime Minister Francois Fillon. The two European leaders also attended the inaugural forum in 2009.

Putin has in the past not attended the Yaroslavl forum, but there has been speculation that the event could be a platform for the ruling tandem to announce who will run in the 2012 presidential elections.

"I think that the president of the Russian state will determine who should attend. ... [Putin and Medvedev] usually don't travel together," Mayor Volunchunas said.

"What the president has decided — it's the president's program — we consider beautiful and worthy, but Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin has his own program, and he also intends to visit Yaroslavl in the near future," he added.

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