

Ministry Branch 'Advised' Journalists on Putin Rally

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An [article](#) on the Odintsovo.info news portal claims that the Moscow region branch of the press ministry sent a memorandum to state-owned news outlets with instructions on how to properly cover a pro-Putin rally, but the ministry denied the claim.

Newspapers in the region said they hadn't received the document, and the ministry in question said it was fake.

The news portal reported Monday that the memo, allegedly from the Moscow region Press and Information Ministry, instructs journalists at state-owned media outlets to give the impression that rally participants came by choice and to distance Prime Minister Vladimir Putin from the unpopular ruling United Russia party — which he leads, although he is not a member.

“In general, show the volunteer atmosphere of the rally (happy faces, mothers with children,

pensioners and middle-aged people),” it says. “Note that people came of their own free will.”

Items not to show or mention, according to the memo, include: “United Russia or its symbols,” “local administration buildings with flags” and “officials who represent the ruling party, the head of the local administration, or parliamentarians associated with United Russia.”

Reached by telephone, an official with the ministry said the document — which does not contain overt information about its source — was a fake. “It’s completely ridiculous,” said the official, who declined to give his name.

The editors-in-chief of Lytkarinskiye Vesti and Lyuberetskaya Panorama — two of 56 local newspapers run by the ministry — said they both hadn’t received the document, and an official with Podolsky Rabochy said her newspaper hadn’t received one either, contradicting a report [published](#) in Gazeta.ru.

Vladimir Burmatov, a member of Putin’s campaign staff, told Gazeta.ru that he had serious misgivings about the document’s authenticity because opposition whistleblower Alexei Navalny linked to it on his blog. “It’s either someone’s stupid initiative, or it’s a provocation,” he said.

One expert wondered why ministry officials would risk scandal to state the obvious in writing. Journalists at state-owned media outlets don’t need to be told how to cover pro-Putin rallies, said Ivan Zassoursky, a professor at Moscow State University’s journalism school.

But Grigory Yans, the author of the original article on Odintsovo.info, stood by the allegations. “It’s absolutely true,” he said by telephone, adding that Putin supporters have used administrative resources to bolster their candidate.

The Kommersant daily noted that a ministry official, Marina Minayeva, is listed as the author in the Microsoft Word file’s document properties.

Approval ratings for Putin and United Russia have fallen in recent months, dropping sharply after Dec. 4 Duma elections tarnished by allegations of fraud. Forty-nine percent of respondents in a Jan. 21–22 poll by state-run VTsIOM said they would vote for Putin on March 4.

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