

Berlusconi and Putin Celebrate on the Slopes

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Former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi offering his personal congratulations at a ski resort near Sochi. **Dmitry Astakhov**

Former Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi skipped his first planned television appearance since stepping down to travel to Russia to personally congratulate Vladimir Putin on his presidential election win instead.

He joined Putin and current President Dmitry Medvedev at a cafe in the Krasnaya Polyana ski resort Wednesday evening in Sochi.

Berlusconi has enjoyed warm relations with Putin over a number of years and played host to the Russian leader at his private villa in Sardinia in 2008.

Berlusconi resigned in November amid urgent calls for reforms in the face of the economic crisis.

Producers of top Italian political discussion show "Porta a Porta" say he had been expected

to speak on air about his resignation before canceling the appearance.

On Friday, Putin showed off his shooting skills during a biathlon in Sochi on Friday, brandishing his macho image just days after his electoral win.

"Vladimir Putin tried the role of a ski-shooter," the government said in a statement, but did not elaborate further.

State news agencies, however, reported that Putin hit three out of five targets on his first try. He then improved to hit four out of five targets at 50 meters when he shot a special rifle for visually impaired people that makes a noise when aimed correctly.

(AP, Reuters)

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