

# Medvedev Accepts Top Party Job

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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Medvedev speaking Friday with members of the United Russia party at the presidential residence in Gorki, outside Moscow. **Mikhail Klimentyev**

In a widely expected move, President Dmitry Medvedev has accepted an offer to take over the United Russia party, all but guaranteeing his election at a special convention next month.

President-elect Vladimir Putin announced earlier this week that he would resign the party chairmanship after his May 7 inauguration and recommended that Medvedev take his place.

On Friday, Medvedev accepted a formal offer from Boris Gryzlov, the party's second in command.

Often regarded as a liberal among the ruling elite, Medvedev also moved to align himself more clearly with the party's conservative majority.

"I'm often told that I'm a liberal. But I can tell you openly: My convictions have never been liberal. ... I have conservative values," he said, Interfax reported.

Analysts said the statement was an attempt to smooth over relations with the ruling party's conservative majority, which Medvedev has irritated as president by placing modernization and privatization at the forefront of his domestic policy.

"Medvedev is showing all the signs of a politician who needs United Russia to see him as one of their own," said Alexei Mukhin of the Center for Political Information. "Earlier, Medvedev criticized the party like a normal person. Now he's adopted the rhetoric of a party leader."

Medvedev is expected to be elected party chairman at a May 26 convention, and he could become a member before that, senior United Russia State Duma Deputy Sergei Neverov told Interfax.

In a mild rebuke of his mentor, Medvedev said that future presidents should be associated with a party.

"Or else, we simply can't explain to people which political force is in power," he said, Interfax reported.

Neither Putin nor Medvedev were members of political parties during their presidencies, even though Putin maintained the post of United Russia party chairman.

In a show of mixed feelings within the ruling party, Putin's announcement Tuesday sparked a minor exodus of party members opposed to Medvedev's arrival, including Alexei Chadayev, the head of the party's political department, who criticized Medvedev's ability to lead.

"The defections by conservatives within the party was very unpleasant for Medvedev, and he wants to stop the trend from people within the conservatives of the party," said Pavel Salin, an expert with the Kremlin-connected think tank Center for Current Politics.

Yelena Pozdnyakova of the Center of Political Technologies said being seen as a conservative will help Medvedev as prime minister, a job he has been publicly promised by Putin.

"If he wants to work well with the Duma, where United Russia holds a majority, he's going to have to gain the trust and support of the party," she said.

The remark is certain to spark further disillusion among Medvedev's liberal admirers, many of whom have been disappointed by the pace of political and economic reforms.

"Despite his liberal talk, it's always been clear from the decisions he's made as president that he's a conservative at heart," Mukhin said. "Medvedev began radical political reforms only after he effectively became a lame duck. It was clear that they were reforms for Putin, not for Medvedev," he said.

Medvedev also said on Friday that he will appear at the mass march and rally in central Moscow May 1 organized by United Russia and Putin's All-Russia People's Front.

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