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CIS Summit Delayed Amid Putin Health Worries

By The Moscow Times

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A flyswatter bearing Putin's image is displayed Thursday at a Krasnoyarsk exhibition of works by Vasily Slonov. **Ilya Naymushin**

A summit of CIS leaders scheduled for Friday has been postponed amid talk that President Vladimir Putin is suffering from back trouble.

The executive committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose group created as the Soviet Union broke apart in 1991, said earlier this month the summit was due to take place in Turkmenistan on Nov. 2.

"The [new] dates are being confirmed. They are being agreed with all the presidents," CIS spokeswoman Vera Yakubovskaya said Friday.

She declined to give any reason for the postponement.

The Kremlin dismissed talk that Putin had been sidelined from foreign trips after government

sources told Reuters that he was suffering from back trouble that could require surgery.

The sources said Putin's schedule was being cleared for early November, including the postponement until late December of a trip to India that had been expected soon.

“The chief is not well,” said one of the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Another said Putin had been seen recently wearing a back brace.

Putin, a judo black belt who is known for stunts that show off his physical prowess throughout his almost 13 years in power, was first seen limping in September when he hosted an APEC summit in Vladivostok. Putin's spokesman said at the time that his boss had pulled a leg muscle.

He also was caught by TV cameras complaining to Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the summit that he was on a restricted diet.

Speculation increased when Putin failed to travel to Pakistan for a four-nation summit on Afghanistan this month or to make an expected trip to Turkey. None of these trips had been officially announced by the Kremlin.

"Many dates that the media reported as fixed were in fact not fixed. Life brings changes and it concerns plans for visits. A lot of information has been misinterpreted by the media," Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich told reporters.

A recent documentary showed Putin swimming long distances, working out in a gym and eating raw quail eggs and cream cheese for breakfast.

At a meeting Thursday with the Valdai Club of foreign analysts and journalists at his residence outside Moscow, he did not appear to be in pain but, as in other recent public appearances, leaned forward in his seat, putting weight on his right forearm.

Putin, who turned 60 this month, made ties with neighboring former Soviet states his priority when he returned to the Kremlin in May for a third presidential term.

A decree issued hours after his swearing-in called for closer integration of the former Soviet space, a "key foreign policy direction," and reiterated plans for a Eurasian Economic Union, based on a customs union with Kazakhstan and Belarus.

Putin hosted CIS leaders in the Kremlin a week after his inauguration, making it the first major international event of his new term in office. He traveled to Belarus before going to Europe.

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