Putin Congratulates Vote Winner in Oil Ally Venezuela

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Maduro, center, celebrating with his wife after winning the vote Sunday. **Tomas Bravo**

President Vladimir Putin congratulated Nicolas Maduro on Monday on winning Venezuela's presidential election, saying he expected good relations to continue with a country where Moscow has significant oil investments.

Ties between Moscow and Caracas flourished under Hugo Chavez, the socialist leader who died last month of cancer. Maduro was Chavez's chosen successor and Russian officials were hoping for continuity to protect their energy and arms deals there.

"Putin expressed confidence that under Maduro's leadership Venezuela will further strengthen its relations of strategic partnership with Russia," the Kremlin said after the Sunday vote.

Russia has invested billions of dollars in Venezuelan oil projects and has given Caracas loans

to buy weapons.

Igor Sechin, a Putin ally who is the head of Rosneft, Russia's top crude oil producer, has been a regular visitor to discuss oil deals and arms sales in Venezuela.

Just weeks before the late Venezuelan president won re-election last October, Sechin donned a Chavez T-shirt to pose with workers. Sechin also headed Russia's delegation to Chavez's funeral last month.

Russia is on the lookout for new oil and gas projects globally, with the U.S. shale gas revolution putting pressure on its energy export earnings, and is looking for new arms markets after losing some contracts in the Middle East since the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings.

Maduro's main rival in Sunday's election, Henrique Capriles, said he did not accept the result giving Maduro a narrow victory and demanded a recount.

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