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Kremlin Against Ending Ban on Official State Ideology

By Anna Dolgov

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United Russia lawmaker Yevgeny Fyodorov, who put forward the proposal to amend the constitution. **Andrei Makhonin**

President Vladimir Putin has turned down proposals to amend the Constitution so that an official state ideology can be established, though the rebuff doesn't signal the end of his search to find a "national idea" to unite Russians, the Kremlin's spokesman said.

The proposal, put forward by United Russia lawmaker Yevgeny Fyodorov last month, would have removed a ban on state ideology from the first chapter of the Constitution and scrapped provisions integrating international legal norms into Russian law.

"The president isn't going to change the Constitution," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, Izvestia reported Wednesday. "And the Constitution doesn't envisage ideology."

Critics have said that removing a ban on state ideology would indicate a return to Soviet

times, when communism was enshrined as the official doctrine. Amending the first chapter of the Constitution would also be a complex and potentially costly project.

Presidential aides said that Putin could find no reason to introduce an official state ideology, but that he was instead looking for ways to develop patriotism, and a "national idea." It remains unclear how the Kremlin would define the terms, however.

"When we find something of genius, then that will become the national idea, which would further unify Russian citizens," Peskov said, without going into further detail.

The search for a national idea began under Putin's predecessor Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s, but hasn't yielded any fruit, despite Putin's support.

"If we want to preserve our national identity as a whole, then we certainly must cultivate the idea of patriotism," Putin said earlier this week. "Without that, the country would cease to exist, it would simply collapse from within.

"Like a sugar cube, soaked with water — just puff, and it's gone."

Fyodorov said he would continue drafting constitutional amendments, regardless of objections from the Kremlin, saying that Russia would remain a "in the gallows" without a state ideology.

"Without those changes to the Constitution, it would be impossible to form any national idea," he said. "We must remove the provisions that factor international law into our judicial system. The paragraph about a ban on ideology prevents us from forming our national values, the values of our ancestors that were developed over the course of centuries."

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