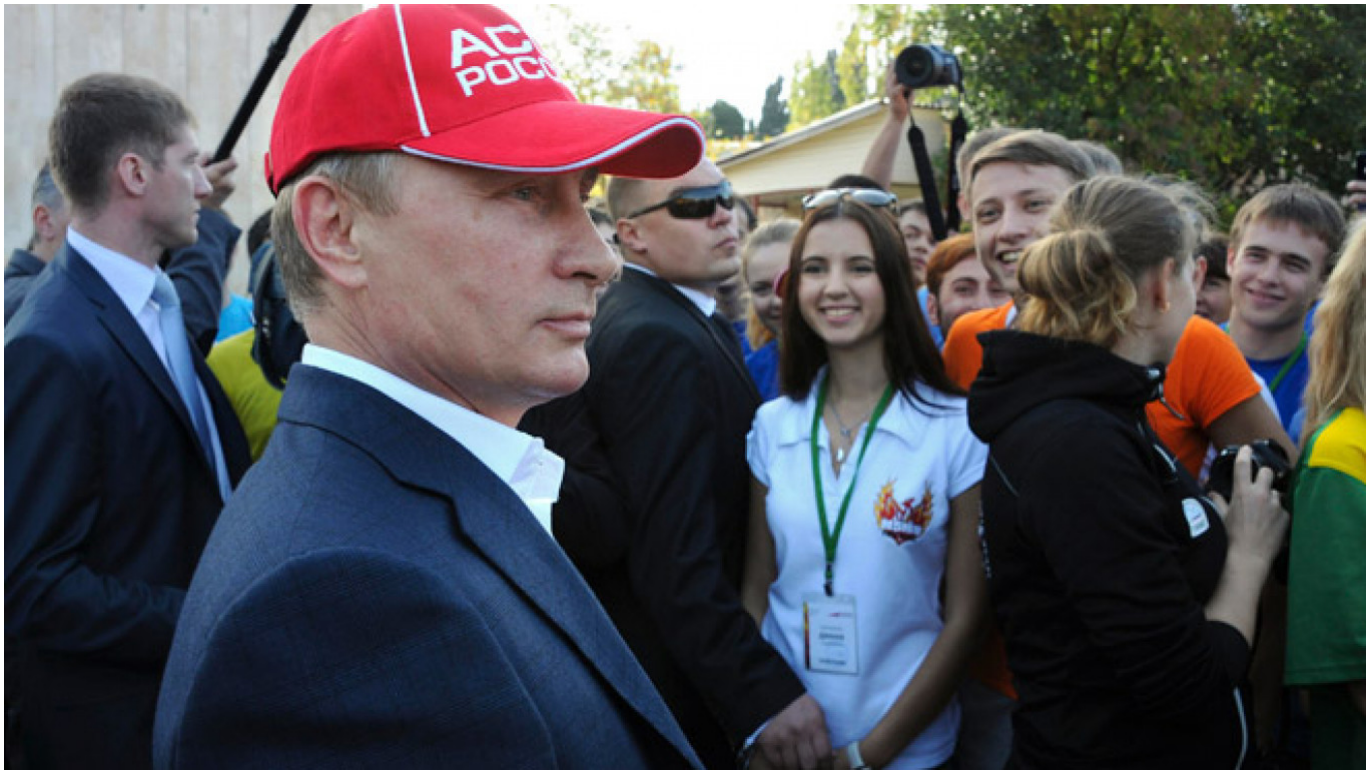
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

'No Putin, No Russia,' Says Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff

By The Moscow Times

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President Vladimir Putin wears a cap as he visits competitions organized by Student Sports Clubs Association of Russia in Sochi, Oct. 23.

Ahead of President Vladimir Putin's speech at the 11th-annual Valdai Discussion Club in Sochi on Friday, deputy chief of staff Vyacheslav Volodin took to the stage to tell international analysts and Russia-watchers that "there is no Russia today if there is no Putin."

In response to a question on the impact of Western sanctions from club member Nikolai Zlobin, founder of the Center on Global Interests research institution in Washington, D.C., Volodin said "any attack on Putin is an attack on Russia," Kommersant reported Thursday.

Volodin backed up his statement with the results of a recent public survey, which showed that 66 percent of Russians could not see any candidates besides Putin running for president in 2018, the newspaper said.

Volodin, who took over from "gray cardinal" Vladislav Surkov, who was credited with building Russia's power vertical, also said that any sense of a "tightening of the screws" in Russia's domestic policies was nothing more than a "hallucination" by those warning of it, Kommersant reported.

This year's theme for the event, held annually with both Russian and international scholars and analysts since 2004, is "The World Order: New Rules or No Rules."

The declared goal of the pro-Kremlin event is to promote dialogue between top Russian leaders and the international intellectual elite, though some critics have denounced it as a thinly veiled attempt to build soft power and validate Kremlin policies through international recognition.

Volodin's comments appear to have largely set the mood for this year's event, which will focus on domestic policies in light of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, unambiguously sending the message that Putin has not lost support at home despite the barrage of Western criticism over Russia's annexation of Crimea in March and subsequent policies in Ukraine.

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