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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

TIME Reader's Poll Proof of Putin's 'Obvious' Popularity, Spokesman Says

By The Moscow Times

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has been named the most influential person in the world — "for better or for worse" — by readers of TIME magazine, a result which his spokesman said is proof of the leader's worldwide popularity and fame, a news report said.

Putin, 62, topped the list with 6.95 percent of the overall vote, beating South Korean pop star Lee Chae-rin, also known as CL, from the group 2NE1 who came in second place, TIME reported Monday.

Female singers Rihanna, Lady Gaga and Taylor Swift made up the top five, while the Dalai Lama, Pope Francis and human rights activist Malala Yousafzai also squeezed into the top 10.

The online poll asked readers in late March to vote for who they thought had "changed the

world this past year, for better or worse." The poll closed on April 10 after collecting votes from Twitter, Facebook and TIME's website with the hashtag #TIME100.

The publication did not specify how many people had participated in the poll, which TIME said gave readers "a say" ahead of the editor-compiled annual list of the world's 100 most influential people that will be released Thursday.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, on Tuesday told journalists he was not surprised by the results of the TIME poll, Interfax news agency reported.

"That the president is one of the most popular, famous and respected politicians in the world — is an obvious fact. Several publications have recorded this leading position," he said.

Russia has returned to the international spotlight in the past year, following its annexation of Crimea and its support for pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Many have blamed Putin for causing Russia's relations with the West to drop to Cold War levels, though domestic support for his policies remains high.

A poll by the Levada Center in February found that Putin's approval rating stood at 86 percent, despite an economic crisis brought on by Western sanctions against Moscow and a global drop in oil prices.

More than half of the votes for the readers' list were cast in the United States, Canada and Britain.

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