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Putin to Skip Presidential Debates, Kremlin Says

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Vladimir Putin. **kremlin.ru**

The Kremlin confirmed Tuesday that President Vladimir Putin will not take the stage to debate his rivals in Russia's March presidential election.

“Everyone can see Putin’s statements on all aspects of Russians’ lives on a virtually daily basis,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

He added that Putin “fundamentally differs” from all other candidates because of his “very busy presidential schedule.”

Russia’s Central Election Commission (CEC) officially registered four candidates for the March presidential race — Putin, Leonid Slutsky of the far-right Liberal Democratic Party, Nikolai Kharitonov of the Communist Party and Vladislav Davankov of the New People party.

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All three Putin rivals voted in support of recognizing the independence of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, which set the stage for Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The only pro-peace hopeful, Boris Nadezhdin, was disqualified from running last week due to alleged flaws in signatures endorsing his candidacy. He is currently disputing the disqualification with Russia's Supreme Court.

The CEC said earlier Tuesday it had been informed by Putin's campaign that he will not take part in the presidential debates on state television and radio.

"It's the candidates' right," CEC secretary Natalia Budarina was quoted as saying by the state-run news agency TASS.

Putin is widely expected to win a fifth term in a tightly controlled wartime election.

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