

Putin Slams His Front's Membership Tactics

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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The  **Moscow Times**

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin condemned the involuntary enlistment of people to his All-Russia People's Front on Thursday after the group embarked on a chaotic membership drive that has swept musicians, architects, HIV and cancer patients and even an entire neighborhood into its fold.

Putin's remarks to a United Russia conference came after two more people from a professional union publicly denounced the group.

Putin said he opposed recruiting members "on assignment" or "on bureaucratic command" and would not tolerate the "artificial increase of large-scale participation," Interfax reported.

"This can only discredit the very idea" of the group, Putin said.

A day earlier, two members of the Russian Union of Composers, Lyudmila Korabelnikova

and Mikhail Arkadyev, published open [letters](#) that warned the All-Russia People's Front would ruin Russia and asked union leaders to exclude them from it.

"All in all, the mode of recruiting to its ranks (rather, attaching or ascribing) surpasses all we survived in Soviet times in regard to manipulation," Korabelnikova said in her letter published by [Openspace.ru](#).

Arkadyev said he believed the group was started "exclusively" to profane the democratic process in Russia.

Boris Yurgenson, executive secretary of the Russian Union of Composers, defended the union's right to enroll Wednesday, saying that by law the members of a nongovernmental organization were not responsible for the NGO's actions and vice versa.

Yurgenson said, however, that the union might reconsider its decision because some union leaders and a number of its regional branches were "not very happy" with the activities of Putin's group.

Repeated calls to Yurgenson went unanswered Thursday.

Hundreds of public groups and associations have been swept into the front, with some of their members learning about it after the fact.

On Monday, the Russian Union of Architects became the first public group to snub Putin's movement, several days after one of its members published an open letter that said he had found the union listed on the group's [web site](#) and that he would quit the union if it remained a part of the group.

More than 100 union members joined his protest.

A blogger [noted](#) Wednesday that nationwide associations for disabled, deaf, blind and sclerotic people, as well as unions of HIV and cancer patients, have been listed on the group's web site as members.

Another blogger this week published a [letter](#) by a local administration in the Volgograd region informing its subordinates that the All-Russia Union of Local Government had joined Putin's group.

In Vladimir, residents of a whole street enrolled in Putin's movement, the regional United Russia's web site [reported](#).

In Bashkortostan, directors of several grade schools have voiced support for Putin's group, the regional United Russia's web site [reported](#) Wednesday.

Under Putin's initiative, the group was created in early May to consolidate public groups around United Russia and mobilize the public around United Russia ahead of State Duma elections in December.

United Russia has seen its popularity fall to new lows this month. A nationwide [survey](#) conducted by the independent Levada Center and released this week found that United

Russia's popularity had fallen to 53 percent, compared with 57 percent in May and 62 percent in April 2009.

The survey's margin of error was 3.4 percentage points.

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