

NO STATE FUNERAL FOR MIKHAIL GORBACHEV

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Mikhail GorbachevPASCAL GUYOT

Russian President Vladimir Putin is to miss the funeral of the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, denying the man who failed to prevent the collapse of the Soviet empire the full state honours granted to Boris Yeltsin.

Gorbachev, idolised in the West for allowing eastern Europe to escape Soviet communist control but unloved at home for the chaos that his “perestroika” reforms unleashed, will be buried on Saturday after a public ceremony in Moscow’s Hall of Columns.

The grand hall, within sight of the Kremlin, hosted the funerals of Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin and Leonid Brezhnev. Gorbachev will be given a military guard of honour — but his funeral will not be a state one.

State television on Thursday showed Mr. Putin paying tributes by placing red roses beside Gorbachev’s coffin — left open as is the tradition — in Moscow’s Central Clinical Hospital, where he died on Tuesday aged 91.

Mr. Putin made a sign of the cross in Russian Orthodox fashion before briefly touching the edge of the coffin. “Unfortunately, the president’s work schedule will not allow him to do this on Sept. 3, so he decided to do it today,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

He said Gorbachev’s ceremony would have “elements” of a state funeral, and that the state was helping to organise it.

Nevertheless, it will be a marked contrast to the funeral of Yeltsin, who was instrumental in sidelining Gorbachev as the Soviet Union fell apart and hand-picked Putin, a career KGB intelligence officer, as the man most suited to succeed him.

When Yeltsin died in 2007, Mr. Putin declared a national day of mourning and, alongside world leaders, attended a grand state funeral in Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

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