

Russians Criticize Putin on Corruption, Poll Says

August 15, 2010

The  Moscow Times

Russians like Prime Minister Vladimir Putin for boosting Moscow's image abroad and improving living standards, but fault him for not fighting corruption or reining in billionaires, according to a new survey.

The poll by the independent Levada Center found that Putin's overall ratings remained broadly positive. Fifty-nine percent of respondents said Putin was doing a good job or would do a good job sorting out Russia's problems, down from 63 percent a year earlier.

When asked in detail about Putin's achievements and failings, a more nuanced picture emerged.

On the positive side, 23 percent credited Putin with "strengthening Russia's relations with the West," and 20 percent praised him for improving living standards. Nineteen percent liked him for "strengthening Russia's positions abroad."

But a much higher proportion — 37 percent — said Putin's least successful action had been

the fight against corruption.

A further 24 percent criticized him for not curbing the power of the country's billionaires, and 18 percent said he had failed to fight crime effectively.

Putin served as president from 2000 to 2008 before handing over the post to his chosen successor, Dmitry Medvedev, and becoming prime minister.

Most Russians believe that Putin remains the final arbiter on important decisions, and polls show that he is the country's most popular politician, with approval ratings of more than 60 percent.

Western politicians, media and human rights groups often accuse Putin of stifling democracy, choking media freedom and curbing opposition.

But the Levada poll indicated that Russians take a very different view. Slightly more respondents praised Putin for protecting democracy and citizens' political rights than faulted him in this area.

But both the positive and the negative tallies on this score were very low — 4 percent and 3 percent, respectively, suggesting that the issue was not important for Russian voters.

Levada polled a sample of 1,600 people from July 23 to 26 for the survey, which had a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points. The poll was published late last week but was taken before Russia's recent catastrophic wildfires.

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