The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Medvedev Calls Russia an 'Imperfect Democracy'

September 10, 2010



YAROSLAVL ⊠ President Dmitry Medvedev told his critics to consider Russia's authoritarian history and said a parliamentary democracy would be a catastrophe for Russia, in statements that he made Friday at a state-run modernization forum.

In the past week, U.S. officials have called on Russia to uphold human rights, their comments following an Aug. 31 rally in Moscow that resulted in about 100 detentions and the jailing of prominent human rights campaigner Lev Ponomaryov two times in as many months.

When pressed about democracy by political analysts at the Yaroslavl forum, dubbed the "Russian Davos," Medvedev said much of the criticism failed to take into account Russia's authoritarian past.

"There has practically never been democracy in Russia. ... There was no democracy when we were ruled by tsars and emperors, and there was no democracy in the Soviet period. So we are a country with a thousand years of authoritarian history."

"We have a very young democracy, an imperfect democracy," he said.

Referencing the system in which ministers are drawn from a federal legislature, Medvedev added, "You could try to have a different political system, for example a parliamentary democracy, in Russia. Our Kyrgyz friends have gone down this path, but I can tell you that for Russia, as for Kyrgyzstan, I am afraid this would be a catastrophe."

"I would really like those who are going to assess Russian democracy to pay attention to our history and the path we have taken over recent years, and for them not to judge us too harshly," Medvedev said.

Opposition leaders and their supporters say the authorities fail to ensure fair elections and that freedom of assembly and freedom of speech are hampered.

Diplomats have praised Medvedev's often tough critiques of Russia's woes, but they say that more than halfway through his term, he still hasn't tackled the nation's corruption and bureaucracy or opened up the political system crafted by former President Vladimir Putin.

But Medvedev did say in Yaroslavl that he would veto any attempt to impose state controls on the Internet. The 44-year-old has been an advocate of Internet use, keeping a public blog and a Twitter account.

The president called for swifter reforms to modernize Russia and diversify its commodity-driven economy, which is growing again after contracting 7.9 percent last year, its worst annual economic performance since 1994.

He said the rebound in growth this year showed that Russia was still stuck in a boom-bust cycle dependent on global oil and gas prices.

"We need to change the structure of the economy. Otherwise we have no future," he said. "We are not in a condition where we can stand still any more."

"As to our current political model, changes can only be cautious, step by step, so that stability is not destroyed," Medvedev said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/09/10/medvedev-calls-russia-an-imperfect-democracy-a1301