The Moscow Times
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New Mayor Vows to Tackle Graft

October 20, 2010

Sergei Sobyanin, a longtime lieutenant of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, took office as Moscow's mayor on Thursday and vowed to curb the corruption and excessive bureaucracy that he said was stifling development.

The Moscow City Duma, dominated by Putin's ruling United Russia party, confirmed Sobyanin by a 32-2 vote to replace Yury Luzhkov, who had held office for 18 years but was fired by President Dmitry Medvedev last month after an escalating feud.

In remarks to the City Duma ahead of a vote whose outcome was never in doubt, Sobyanin vowed to tackle the corruption, excessive bureaucracy and mismanagement that he said had undermined Moscow's post-Soviet revival.

"The city has changed for the better and taken its rightful place as a leading global megapolis," Sobyanin said. "But in recent years it is clear that many opportunities have been missed. The pace of development has gradually slowed.

"I am deeply convinced that corruption and bureaucracy threaten to devalue many if not all of Moscow's competitive advantages," said Sobyanin, who was sworn in later at a ceremony

attended by Medvedev and Russian religious leaders. "It is obvious that the city needs a more open and effective system of management."

Sobyanin, 52, became Kremlin chief of staff in 2005, when Putin was president, and stayed with Putin when he became prime minister after steering Medvedev into the presidency in 2008.

Analysts say the choice strengthens the Kremlin's control over Moscow. It also sets up Sobyanin as a potential Putin-backed candidate for the presidency in the future, vastly raising the profile of a figure who is seen as secretive and said little in public before he was picked to be mayor.

"I hope ... I will remain a part of your big team," Sobyanin told Putin at a Cabinet meeting.

Putin praised Sobyanin for his "energy and results" and said he had awarded him a medal for his work as government chief of staff and deputy prime minister. He said he was sure that "Muscovites will not regret their choice."

Sobyanin was not chosen by voters but picked by Medvedev out of four candidates proposed by United Russia. During his presidency, Putin backed legislation abolishing the direct elections of regional governors and the Moscow mayor.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/10/20/new-mayor-vows-to-tackle-graft-a2392