

Promises, Promises

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November 30, 2010

The  **Moscow Times**

It must be nice to be president. Could you imagine if every half hour Ekho Moskvyy radio announced, instead of the news: “Tomorrow at this time you’ll be able to hear the news on this station. We’ve set a goal and a plan: to provide you the news. It’ll be incredible. Amazing. Fantastic. The world’s best. And, don’t forget, tomorrow. We promise.” How long could that continue before everyone stopped listening to Ekho Moskvyy?

But President Dmitry Medvedev continually promises to start working and never does. Not only does everybody listen to him, they even deem his statements worth discussing.

Medvedev promised to take care of the people responsible for the death of Hermitage Capital lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, whose killers stole more than \$200 million from the state. And they were taken care of. The top suspects in his death were given promotions.

Do you think Medvedev was outraged? Not in the least. Medvedev made another promise — to get to the bottom of the February car crash on Leninsky Prospekt involving a LUKoil vice president. The result: the two women who died were conveniently blamed for the accident.

Do you think Medvedev was outraged? Again, not in the least. He just made another promise — to investigate allegations of bribery related to construction projects for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. This was in response to businessman Valery Morozov's claim that a certain Vladimir Leshchevsky, deputy head of construction at the Office of Presidential Affairs, extorted from him 1.5 billion rubles (\$48 million).

Morozov filed a complaint with the Interior Ministry's economic crimes department and even videotaped the transaction to catch the bribe taker. The result? The video and the money disappeared. Morozov took his story to *The Sunday Times* and *Novaya Gazeta*.

And what happened next? The authorities came down hard — on *Novaya Gazeta*. Vladimir Kozhin, head of the Office for Presidential Affairs, filed a defamation lawsuit against the newspaper for insulting his honor and dignity, and last Friday won the case. The court valued Kozhin's honor and dignity at 100,000 rubles.

Do you think Medvedev hauled in Kozhin to demand an explanation? Or that he fired him? Far from it. Medvedev simply made another promise — this time to find out who was behind the beating of *Kommersant* journalist Oleg Kashin.

And do you suppose Kashin's assailants have been brought to justice? Guess again. Khimki Mayor Vladimir Strelchenko and state youth agency head Vasily Yakemenko, the two primary suspects, remain in their posts. True, we don't know whether Kashin's beating was Strelchenko's work. But we do know that everyone who regularly opposes the mayor ends up with a busted skull. And this isn't happening in the North Caucasus or some remote corner of Siberia, but in Khimki, just a couple kilometers beyond the Moscow Ring Road.

And how has Medvedev responded? He made yet another policy speech, this time promising to deal with the stagnation in the country's political life. Political analysts rushed to comment, saying, "Oh, what bold things for Medvedev to say. What will he do now? He'll show them a thing or two!"

The situation reminds me of an old joke. A violinist is constantly late to his orchestra's practices, and the conductor is constantly making the same threat. "If you're late one more time, I'll take you out and rape you!" Well the violinist was late once again, and the conductor made his usual threat.

The violinist responded, with a little smile, "Oh, Ivan Ivanovich, you're always making promises!"

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The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/11/30/promises-promises-a3379>