

# Prokhorov, Rogozin Lost in Putin's Kremlin Plans

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It is good to know that Russia's ruling tandem pays attention to this column. Earlier this month, I suggested that since Prime Minister Vladimir Putin appeared to be returning to the Kremlin as president in 2012, he would be well advised to nominate President Dmitry Medvedev as his reformist prime minister so he would continue his program of modernization. Putin and Medvedev announced this very decision at a United Russia convention on Saturday. Medvedev also confirmed my suggestion that this arrangement had been initially discussed when the tandem was formed in 2007.

Putin and Medvedev have shown good sense in keeping the tandem. This is a strong signal for the Russian elite to close ranks before a gathering perfect storm of global economic adversity hits Russia hard in the next several years.

Putin's return to the presidency is essential to guarantee that the country does not come apart as Prime Minister Medvedev implements a broad mandate of changes to modernize Russia.

Medvedev clearly will have a guaranteed six-year term as prime minister to carry on with a program that should not be limited to economic modernization only.

The tandem's weekend announcement has been made possible by a recent series of mutual concessions and tightly choreographed political steps that eliminated any scenario for unilateral and highly contested moves by Medvedev or Putin.

Medvedev had to give up all options for an independent run for president. This explains his personal involvement in killing the Right Cause party under billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, who only three months earlier had been encouraged to lead a liberal party into the next Duma to ensure Medvedev's independent nomination for president. (Prokhorov's political idiocy created a perfect pretext for eliminating Right Cause.) Medvedev also had to ditch the self-serving advice of his liberal advisers to quickly announce his candidacy.

Putin for his part abandoned plans for a close political alliance with the leader of moderate Russian nationalists, Dmitry Rogozin, who was to get the No. 3 spot on United Russia's ticket and the Duma speakership for running a forceful campaign against liberals, if Medvedev was to run on their ticket.

The new tandem arrangement might codify the devolution of power to a government with a parliamentary majority and a new Duma speaker. It is not a completely fresh start, but neither it is stagnation.

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

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