The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Medvedev Promises to Expand Cabinet as Prime Minister

By Alexandra Odynova

October 16, 2011



Medvedev holding up a “photographing allowed” sign at Digital October. **Alexander Zemlianichenko**

President Dmitry Medvedev has promised to expand the Cabinet and to "seriously reconstruct" United Russia as prime minister next year.

Medvedev's comments to a ragtag bunch of celebrities and politicians Saturday were an attempt to assure supporters disgruntled by his decision to give up the presidency that he is staying in politics and bringing his modernization agenda with him.

But his second attempt to smooth the feathers of his core constituency, the middle class, appeared to have a mixed effect — judging by the reaction in the blogosphere, where Twitter posts about his speech, marked with the hashtag "pathetic," competed with approving "yes" hashtags.

"They are trying to frighten us with stagnation," Medvedev told the audience at the Digital

October conference center. "I want to say a few words about that: It won't happen."

"I don't know who will replace the current governing team," Medvedev said, according to a transcript on the Kremlin's web site.

"I hope they will be better, more intelligent, more competent than we have been, but now I see it as my personal duty to continue working," he added, stressing that he expected members of the audience to help him.

His audience numbered some 200 people, among them liberal-minded businessmen, artists, public activists, bloggers and celebrities. The guest list included the head of the Skolkovo foundation, billionaire Viktor Vekselberg; directors Fyodor Bondarchuk and Alexei Popogrebsky; gallery owner Marat Gelman, Yandex head Arkady Volozh, pop star Viktoria Daineko and television show host Tina Kandelaki.

But in a bid at broad representation, also invited were a decorated tank commander who took part in the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, a steel worker and several of Medvedev's allies with the ruling United Russia party.

"If we win the [State Duma] vote in December ... we will have to do some serious reconstructing of the party," Medvedev said about United Russia, whose electoral list he is topping. He was addressing director Bondarchuk, a party member who nevertheless lashed out at United Russia shortly before Putin announced his return.

Medvedev also said he would not give up on modernization, which would call for a "so-called big Cabinet" or "extended Cabinet."

He did not explain what that meant, but he did say the big government would work together with the "traditional Cabinet, United Russia, civil society, experts, regional and municipal authorities and voters."

He urged the audience to consider giving feedback to the proposal. The attendees wasted no time in proposing to form a public committee to help create the "big Cabinet."

"Have no doubt, both the 'big government' and the smaller, real Russian government will consist of new people," the president said.

Medvedev said he called the gathering to explain his decision not to run for the presidency in March, nominating his mentor Prime Minister Vladimir Putin instead. Putin said he would make Medvedev his prime minister in the post-election Cabinet.

Speaking of Putin, Medvedev said they are "not competitors in everyday life, but close comrades, friends for 20 years already; otherwise there would be no political career in Moscow for me."

Medvedev earlier explained the proposed job swap, announced at the United Russia convention last month, in a prime-time television interview with the three main national channels, saying he was stepping down because Putin remained the more popular politician.

But that interview did little to stop the backlash by his liberal-minded supporters, who were

not the prime-time television audience.

For the second try, Medvedev selected a more modern venue, speaking at the high-tech Digital October nestled in the Krasny Oktyabr building, the former Soviet confectionery factory.

He was also decidedly less formal than at the pompous United Russia event, sporting no tie and walking about the stage as he spoke, his iPad resting on a desk. Moreover, he waved around a green "photographing allowed" sign, introduced by bloggers fighting rampant bans on photography around the country, most of them of questionable legality.

Not everyone took Medvedev up on his invitation to attend the meeting. Rustem Agadamov, who runs one of Russia's most popular LiveJournal blogs, Drugoi, told the Izvestia newspaper that he was interested at first, but rejected the invitation after he learned the event was associated with United Russia.

Izvestia reported Saturday, citing unidentified Kremlin officials, that Agadamov might have been onto something because the meeting was a test of a new campaign format for the Duma vote invented by the Kremlin's top ideologist, Vladislav Surkov, who is loathed by a large part of the liberal constituency. Surkov did not comment on the report.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/10/16/medvedev-promises-to-expand-cabinet-as-prime-minister-a10189