

Putin Ready To Talk to Opposition

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that he was ready for dialogue with the opposition after the biggest protest against his 12-year rule last weekend but added that he was at a loss for a leader to hold talks with.

"The dialogue should take place," Putin told reporters. "In what form? I will think about it. They should formulate some kind of shared platform. ... Who do we talk to?"

Tens of thousands gathered in central Moscow on Saturday to protest against election results that gave Putin's United Russia party a majority in the State Duma. International monitors said the vote was marred by violations.

Putin, accused of being out of touch with the growing protest movement, has walked a thin line between questioning the opposition's credibility as a real political force and addressing protesters' concerns in the country of 140 million.

The opposition, marginalized under Putin's tightly controlled political system, has been galvanized by the protests but has failed to unite behind a single leader.

Putin said the demonstrators were made up of a mix of marginalized liberal movements, communists and nationalists, who had so far failed to reach a common set of demands.

"Is there a common platform there? No there isn't," he said. "We need to talk to everybody about their claims, about their problems, but it requires some thinking."

He refused to comment about blogger Alexei Navalny, whose arrest during a protest the day after the Dec. 4 election won him prominence among the opposition. He was released last week.

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