

Putin Realigns Positions in Writings

By [Howard Amos](#)

January 30, 2012



Putin signing a new car as he visits the Tikhvin Railway Car Building Plant, in Tikhvin, about 170 kilometers to the east of St. Petersburg on Monday. **Alexei Nikolsky**

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin laid out his economic vision in the third of a weekly series of articles titled "Ideas for Russia" on Monday and called for a smaller state presence in business, a fight against corruption, institutional reform and a drive to wean Russia off its oil dependency.

But, while economic experts said the piece's candor was fresh, other commentators lambasted the 5,000-word article, which was published in business daily Vedomosti and on Putin's election website, as being short on detail and little more than a rehash of old ideas.

Putin, who is expected to win Russia's presidential election on March 4, appeared to distance himself from the outgoing president, Dmitry Medvedev.

"Over the last few years on the initiative of President Medvedev we began a whole series of reforms aimed at the improvement of the business climate," Putin wrote, in what was his

only mention of Medvedev. "But we have not yet seen any noticeable improvements."

In previous articles published in Izvestia and Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Putin addressed the issue of ethnicity in modern Russia and political questions surrounding the December State Duma elections. Monday's sweeping piece covered the principal financial, commercial and political contours of Russian economic life.

Putin did not shy away from criticizing the structure that he helped entrench during his 12 years at the top of Russian politics.

"The main problem is a lack of transparency and social accountability in the work of state representatives, from the customs and tax services to the judicial and law enforcement systems," Putin wrote. "If you call a spade a spade, we are talking about systemic corruption."

He also quoted a World Bank ranking of the countries with the best business environment that put Russia in 120th place and its neighbor, Kazakhstan, in 47th.

As well as a series of fiscal measures, including pension system reform, a reduction in the budget deficit and tax increases for the rich, Putin said he supported further rounds of privatizations and restrictions on the growth of state-owned companies. "It is essential to change the ideology of state control over business activity and limit its function," he wrote.

The article also included a subsection on innovation — one of the catchwords associated with Medvedev. "The Russian economy is capable of not only buying, it can give birth to innovation."

Speaking Monday at a session of the government commission on technology and innovation, Putin said state-owned companies will spend 950 billion rubles (\$31.2 billion) on innovative programs this year, rising to 1.5 trillion in 2013, Interfax reported. He added that the top managers of state companies will have their salaries tied to indicators of innovative development.

Some analysts said Putin's trenchant criticism of Russia's business climate and use of the innovation tagline appeared to align him with some of Medvedev's refrains.

"I am surprised that Vladimir Putin is so critical of the state of the economy and the investment climate in Russia," Sergei Guriev, rector of the New Economic School, told The Moscow Times. There is truth in the idea that Putin's economic article is actually very close to Medvedev — except that the word "modernization" has been omitted, Guriev said.

"I haven't read anything new," said Igor Yurgens, head of the Institute for Contemporary Development, a think tank closely associated with Medvedev, Gazeta.ru reported.

Other commentators said that while abstract goals were plentiful, there were few details on implementation. In a critical editorial accompanying Putin's piece, Vedomosti noted the proliferation of words like "should," "must" and "need" without any indication of responsibility.

The article on Vedomosti's Facebook page received more than 85,000 "likes." One of the most popular comments beneath the piece on the business daily's website expressed disbelief that

Putin could so lightly admit serious structural problems. "That's enough of producing slogans," wrote a user identified as AVTor, "Twelve years of autocratic management is more than enough to get some results."

Guriev said Putin did not seem to be addressing his usual audience. "This is not a message for his electorate, it's a message for liberal protesters in Moscow," he said.

After attending the government commission on innovation meeting in Tikhvin outside St. Petersburg on Monday, Putin visited the Bogorodichny Uspensky Monastery. He bowed before a icon of the Virgin Mary, lit a candle and was shown around the site, RIA-Novosti reported.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/01/30/putin-realigns-positions-in-writings-a12273>