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Putin Assesses Election Promises

By Anatoly Medetsky

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President-elect Vladimir Putin has given his own, vague estimate of additional costs that his presidential-campaign promises would require.

But he moved to reduce the risk of ballooning social outlays in an economy heavily dependent on wayward oil prices by ordering austerity in other areas.

At the first post-election Cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Putin told the Finance and Economic Development ministries to submit proposals about cutting some other expenditures for this and the following years.

"The issues of macroeconomic stability ... remain priority No. 1," he said.

Putin said he and some other Cabinet ministers had discussed the additional social spending — promised in one of the manifestos he published in the run-up to the election — with President Dmitry Medvedev on Tuesday.

The conclusion was that allocations to encourage people to have more children, raise salaries of teachers at state universities and provide other benefits will equal up to 1.5 percent of gross domestic product per year, he said at the Cabinet meeting.

He didn't give a detailed breakdown of the spending, but the estimate appeared to roughly agree with calculations by Sberbank analysts released last month.

The state bank's report said the implementation of these ideas would require funding by the federal budget equal to 1.2 percent of GDP, and will total 1.3 trillion rubles ($51 billion) by the end of Putin's presidential term in 2018.

Putin walked into the Cabinet meeting room to applause from ministers — apparently meant to salute his victory in the election.

Thanking them for the congratulations, Putin said the "hot time" of "political battles and arguments" was over and demanded steady work on social spending plans and the federal budget for next year.

In a quick question-and-answer session with reporters afterward, Putin indicated again that he saw no threat to the government in the future.

"Thank God, we are past all the domestic political upheavals and bickering," he said.

His statement came the same day as the League of Voters, whose members organized the largest anti-government rallies in post-Soviet Russia this past winter, branded the election unfair.

Vladimir Putin hinted Wednesday that Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin, who oversees the oil and gas sector, would remain a political heavyweight in any reshuffle of senior government and Kremlin posts following his victory in a presidential election, Reuters reported.

When asked at a meeting with journalists on Wednesday what he valued Sechin for, Putin said: "For his professionalism and his grip, for getting the job done. If he starts something, one can be sure that the job will be done. It is very important in the executive branch of power."

In another possible sign that he remains in favor, Sechin, 52, was the first person to be summoned to Putin's country home on Monday morning after election night to report on corruption in state-controlled companies.

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