

Open Government Tells Medvedev to Appoint Protector

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Outgoing President Dmitry Medvedev on Tuesday reiterated a call for extensive privatization and proposed naming a federal prosecutor for business rights.

He made the statements as he held an informal exchange of opinions with Cabinet members and the experts that make up his Open Government group.

At the meeting that was dedicated to developing market competition, Medvedev spoke in favor of leaving the initial privatization plan intact.

"The Cabinet needs to have the heart to conduct the privatization in full," Medvedev said. "We're conducting it as we approved."

Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin has been one of the strongest opponents of the sell-offs.

Medvedev's statement on privatizations followed a speech by Ruben Aganbegyan, president

of the united MICEX-RTS stock exchange, who lamented the high state involvement in the economy.

Medvedev proposed appointing a special federal prosecutor that would protect businesses from unfair official hurdles in doing business.

This could also change the mindset of law enforcement agencies, Medvedev said. Business associations have accused police and prosecutors of harassing companies and entrepreneurs for bribes.

In making the proposal, Medvedev was reacting to the idea, voiced at the meeting, of establishing the position of business ombudsman that could influence official decisions. He said that would be legally unrealistic.

Yana Yakovleva, a business rights activist, took the floor to say prosecutors had always been on the side of complainants against businesspeople in trials.

Medvedev insisted, "I don't think it's not beyond the pale to make it a prosecutor."

He also promised to think about talking to the State Duma about an amnesty for incarcerated businesspeople.

Another issue that came up was the inability of mobile subscribers to change their operator without losing the number. Medvedev said he would ask the Communications and Press Ministry to look into the situation.

Medvedev got a cold shower about some of his policy goals.

"You announced a course toward modernization," said Leonid Melamed, chief executive of a company called Komposit. "Honestly, experts don't sense any modernization."

Medvedev did not react to that statement.

The recent merger of the country's two bourses came under fire from some businesses as limiting competition. Tuesday's meeting took place at the RTS stock exchange on Ulitsa Vozdvizhenka near the Kremlin.

In a theatrical performance, one participant rolled out what he said was a length of 137 meters of various permits for the opening of a store in Moscow, which took 28 months to obtain.

A PricewaterhouseCoopers director, Yekaterina Shapochka, thanked Medvedev for "doing a lot to raise the efficiency of the judiciary."

"Believe me, the business community values it very highly," she said.

Shapochka, however, went on to say some judges remain under the influence of outside forces in passing their rulings. She proposed to oblige judges to report persons contacting them about their cases.

Medvedev said, "In principle, it wouldn't be bad."

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