

Medvedev's Era as Seen on Twitter

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Notes written by fans of the president's Twitter.

It was the end of an era, the kind of moment when a Twitter buff might unleash a barrage of 140-character spurts of sentiment, humor or self-aggrandizement.

But Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's one-time Tweeter-in-chief, was characteristically modest and a little flat when his term as president came to an end Monday: "Thanks to everyone for their support over the past four years as President of Russia. Our dialogue will continue. There is much work ahead!" he tweeted an hour after Vladimir Putin was inaugurated as his replacement.

The underwhelming statement was the final point on a presidential arc that started with hopes for reform, briefly rose to cautious optimism, then diminished into disappointment.

When Medvedev opened a Twitter account in June 2010 while on a visit to Silicon Valley, it was seen as a sign that he wanted to modernize Russia's economy and move away from the stiff, authoritarian ways of Putin.

But Medvedev's 527 tweets as president (398 in English) reveal a man whose initial

enthusiasm dissipated and who distanced himself from the drama around him — as Putin showed he was still boss.

In his first days on Twitter, Medvedev appeared thrilled by the medium's potential and turned into something of a, well, twitterbox. "Haven't had a burger in a while. Lunch with Obama at Ray's Hell Burger," he tweeted on June 25, 2010. A day earlier, it was American know-how rather than chow that had him excited: "Silicon Valley's greatest asset is communication. People discuss their work not trifles. Russia would benefit from this kind of environment."

Then last December, an unprecedented wave of anti-government protests roiled Russia. The world was eager to know what Medvedev thought of them, but learned nothing from Twitter. His sole English post from the turbulent month: "Hello @euHvR, on my way to Brussels. Looking forward to fruitful discussions with Russia's largest trading partner." His Russian posts were no more revealing, including one congratulating the Zenit St. Petersburg football team.

Two days after protests broke out against fraud-tainted State Duma elections, a Medvedev tweet characterized rising opposition star Alexei Navalny as a sheep committing a sexual act with a human. Medvedev tersely followed that up, providing a link to a Kremlin statement explaining that the offensive post was a retweet from a tough-talking ruling party ideologue. An unidentified member of the president's technical staff was blamed for the unauthorized tweet.

In February, already a lame duck, Medvedev appeared gripped by a spell of nostalgia, using Twitter to post some favorite photos: him fishing on a sunny day; a winter landscape snapped from a train window; a view of Buenos Aires from a rain-spattered hotel window. And, looking back on his foray into the world of social media, a picture of him at Twitter headquarters: "Here's how it all began. ... Today I have 1,000,000 readers. Thanks for communicating with me."

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