

Putin Scowls After Duma's Underwhelming Vote for Medvedev

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Putin listening as Medvedev speaks at his Duma confirmation hearing. **Maxim Shemetov**

Dmitry Medvedev won enough support in the State Duma to become prime minister Tuesday, but President Vladimir Putin bristled over what some deputies said was a shortfall in the two-thirds of the vote that he apparently wanted.

Putin ordered Medvedev's appointment as prime minister minutes after the 299-144 vote.

At least five lawmakers from the Duma's opposition-minded factions voted for Medvedev, assuming that all United Russia and Liberal Democratic deputies showed up and adhered to earlier promises to throw their weight behind the former president.

Communist and Just Russia deputies said the Kremlin pushed for the 450-seat Duma to give Medvedev more than 300 votes, or two-thirds of the legislature.

Medvedev took pains to stress before and after the vote that he would take suggestions

from all political forces as prime minister.

"We all want Russia to flourish," he said in remarks immediately following his confirmation. "And we will all work on this."

Medvedev also gave a lengthy and monotonous speech before the confirmation vote that probably did little to sway any deputies uncertain about whether to support his candidacy. He used his speech to list the government's previous successes and offer assurances that he would seek to achieve more in almost every area, ranging from investment to culture.

Putin, who came to the Duma to present his choice for prime minister, snapped at opposition-minded lawmakers who apparently mocked him during a speech he gave after Medvedev's confirmation. "You laugh at home in your kitchen," he said angrily.

What prompted the outburst was the reaction of one or more deputies — unseen by reporters in a room where they watched the session on closed-circuit television — to Putin's criticism of the Soviet Union's capacity to produce mass consumption goods of acceptable quality. A voice or voices from the audience, likely from the Communist faction, pointed out that Soviet industry had made possible the world's first space flight.

Coming out of the hall, Communist Deputy Anatoly Lokot attributed Putin's irritation to the vote shortfall. "They wanted it to be more than 300," he said. "The irritation showed, all this yelling."

Just Russia Deputy Ilya Ponomarev, well known for his role in organizing street protests that have dented the semblance of Putin's universal popularity, also said before the vote that the Kremlin had hoped for two-thirds support for Medvedev.

Ponomarev, who came to the Duma from a small protest near the Kitai-Gorod metro, wore the white-ribbon symbol of the anti-Putin demonstrations.

Ponomarev also said that his party had seated him, the ribbon pinned to his shirt, right in front of Medvedev when Medvedev earlier in the day met with party members in an appeal for their support. "He sincerely believes he will be able to do something on his own," he said, sharing his impressions of the meeting with reporters. "I think his ministers will check their every step with Putin."

Medvedev pledged an enormous Cabinet overhaul, saying his Cabinet would have four new ministers for every old minister, Ponomarev said. Medvedev didn't bring up this issue at the Duma session.

It remains unclear when Medvedev and Putin might announce a new Cabinet.

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