Medvedev Says Putin Swap Was 'Honest'

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Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev insists that swapping places with President Vladimir Putin was an "honest decision."

Medvedev, whose image as a liberal-leaning president was tarnished after he publicly announced that he wouldn't seek a second presidential term and would instead cede the job to his predecessor, said that his decision to allow Putin to run was "honest and legal."

Speaking on the hard-hitting television show hosted by Vladimir Pozner, Medvedev also said that a proposed increase in fines for illegal demonstrations should not be "extremely big" and that violators should only face administrative charges, not criminal punishment.

United Russia is trying to increase punishment for violations on demonstrations, amid ongoing opposition protests in Moscow. The second reading of the controversial law is expected to be voted on June 5.

While Medvedev said that the fines shouldn't be "too big," he did say violators should still be "financially punished" if they break the law.

He also said that he is not in favor of the proposed 15-day administrative jail sentences currently contained in the bill.

"I think it is too much," Medvedev said.

While Medvedev became the head of United Russia last week, it is unclear how much actual influence he has over the party, which for the most part remains loyal to Putin.

Medvedev became the country's highest-ranking official to appear on the Pozner show since it began broadcasting in 2008. He is also Russia's first prime minister to head a political party.

Medvedev denied that the team of former ministers he was putting together would be independent of the presidential administration.

"They will have their area of expertise, but it won't have anything to do with governmental decisions," he said.