

Protests Are the 'New Norm,' Shuvalov Says

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Igor Shuvalov **Michael Wuertenberg**

ST. PETERSBURG — Political protest is the “new norm” in Russia, and the government has to have a dialogue with the rising middle class, First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov said.

“We are passing the way of all developed countries, and we need to learn how to live with a situation where the middle class is active and wants to be loud if they don’t like something,” Shuvalov said in an interview at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum.

Tens of thousands of people took to the streets to protest purported ballot fraud after State Duma elections in December, and rallies have continued since Vladimir Putin’s presidential election victory in March.

The end of the election cycle does not mean that increasingly affluent urban Russians will lose their appetite for change, and the new government will need to respond to their demands, Shuvalov said Friday.

“It’s the new norm for us. ... It’s a major risk for us if we try to avoid that kind of protest. We need to learn how to live with this and what we should do to meet people’s needs,” he said.

Shuvalov, echoing a speech by Putin to foreign investors Thursday, made clear that calls for change in Russia should not pose a threat to the country’s stability.

“We are changing our political system,” Shuvalov said. “The president was very clear. This is very good; this is normal. But whatever we are doing, we should do it within the law.”

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