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Medvedev Mulls Ending Kyoto Role

By Roland Oliphant

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President Dmitry Medvedev has ordered a review of Russia's involvement in the Kyoto Protocol, raising the possibility that the country could finally "wave goodbye" to the climate treaty altogether.

"We have to admit that we did not get any special benefits from the Kyoto Protocol in the commercial sense," Medvedev said at a Cabinet session Thursday. "We weren't able to use it as it was needed. That's fair. But it doesn't mean that, against common sense, we should drag out [our participation]."

Medvedev ordered Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich to look into Russia's continued involvement in the protocol.

Officials have just more than a month to decide on a position before delegates gather at summit in Doha, Qatar, at the end of November to discuss a replacement for the current treaty.

Responding to Medvedev's comments that Russia could "wave goodbye" to the treaty if the world community could not find agreement, Dvorkovich said that "nothing has changed in the international community, so [adopted] decisions should be followed."

Dvorkovich said at the Cabinet meeting Thursday that he had ordered a study of the possibility of entering into a bilateral carbon-trading deal with the EU, but he added that "given tense relations with the EU [over energy], I don't know how likely that scenario is."

Russia's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in 2004 provided the quorum of signatories necessary to bring the treaty into force in 2005, but the country refused to take on new obligations in the second implementation period at a summit in Durban, South Africa, in December.

Then Russia joined Canada and Japan in arguing that the second implementation period, which is due to start in 2013, would be pointless because it does not bind major emitters like the United States and China. All three refused to take on obligations in the second period.

A pro-Kyoto lobby made up of financiers and businessmen, including representatives of state-owned VTB and Sberbank, said at a conference last week that they would lobby the government to take part in Kyoto 2 after all because Russian businesses stand to profit from the carbon markets.

Oleg Pluzhnikov, a deputy director of the department for tariff regulation, infrastructure reform and energy efficiency at the Economic Development Ministry, said last week that participation in the second commitment period would protect Russian industry from carbon limits in countries that impose internal restrictions.

Skeptics, including presidential adviser on climate change Alexander Bedritsky, have argued that Kyoto is useless without U.S. and Chinese involvement and have pushed for an internal cap-and-trade system as an alternative.

Russia's carbon emissions in 2010 were 35 percent below 1990 levels. The 6 billion tons of carbon it has saved from its quota would be worth about 30 billion euros, assuming a price of 5 euros per ton.

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