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Kudrin Lashes Out at Medvedev's Cabinet

By Irina Filatova

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At the news conference on Tuesday, Kudrin criticized Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's government and called for tougher anti-corruption measures.

Former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin on Tuesday castigated Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's Cabinet as inefficient, but he rejected speculation that he would come back to the government in the near future.

Despite praising Medvedev's personal contribution to the 18-year process of Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization during his presidency, Kudrin said the Cabinet's work has been "unsuccessful" since a post-election reshuffle in May.

The new Cabinet missed the chance to alleviate tensions in society, which over the past year has experienced the largest protests since the early 1990s, he said.

"This year can be considered lost from the standpoint of political and economic changes," he

said, Interfax reported.

But he sounded optimistic, saying that the authorities had taken some meager steps toward dialogue with civil society.

Kudrin spoke during a wide-ranging news conference at which he also provided his outlook for the country's economic prospects.

He said this year had been critical for the country's development, as society had decisively demanded political change. He also said a transition to a new political system in the future is inevitable.

Although upsurges in political activity are likely to be followed by a period of decline, this does't mean that the country will experience "political stagnation," Kudrin said.

"As a result, a more modern society will be created," he said. "Today, we can't say precisely how many years this will require, but these will be years of significant changes in political life."

After his ouster as finance minister last year, Kudrin voiced support for the protests, calling for dialogue between the Kremlin and the opposition. Earlier this year, he offered to be an intermediary in the dialogue.

He later established a nongovernmental organization aimed at supporting civil society.

The position of a well-connected high-profile expert Kudrin took after his ouster is temporary, said Andrei Ryabov, a political analyst at the Carnegie Moscow Center.

The two options for him at the moment are to become involved in real political activity or return to the government, he said.

Kudrin refused to discuss a comeback to the Cabinet at Tuesday's conference, saying that "too many conditions are necessary" for that to happen.

Kudrin is likely to return to the government only if he is assigned to oversee a large-scale program of strategic economic reforms and has a real influence in the Cabinet, Ryabov said.

"Kudrin will never agree to play a ceremonial role," he said, adding that the new Cabinet has yet to develop a clear reform strategy.

Kudrin said earlier this month that during his time in office he hadn't been satisfied with "just occupying a minister position without doing anything."

In an interview with German newspaper Frankfurter Rundschau, he spoke of the country's urgent need for economic reforms, which had almost stagnated.

During Tuesday's news conference, Kudrin supported some of the steps President Vladimir Putin had outlined as part of his economic policy. But he also said the policy for Putin's third term has yet to be shaped.

"The search for [a new policy] is under way," Kudrin said.

He called for more decisive measures by the government to fight corruption, saying "political will" rather than "spontaneous measures" would make that work effective.

"The problem of corruption is obvious," he said. "It has become a significant problem. The authorities ... are starting to react, but the reaction is still spontaneous, although a more comprehensive system should be created."

He also said Russia might face new economic risks resulting from growing tensions with Western countries. Those risks, Kudrin said, arise from the government's effort "to create a myth" about the foreign financing of the protest movement.

"This is far from reality" and might undermine the country's plans to create favorable conditions for foreigners working in Russia, he said.

In yet another critical remark, he said he doesn't support Russia's reponses to passage of the Magnitsky Act in the U.S. He called the reaction "very speculative."

He said the bill should not be passed "in a rush," just to respond to political actions.

"It has nothing to do with children, and moreover, it can't be a response to the Magnitsky Act," Kudrin said.

A long-standing ally of President Vladimir Putin, Kudrin stated that he had shared his opinions on economic issues with the president.

"He asked my position on some things. I told him what I think," Kudrin said, adding that he also discussed those issues during a recent meeting with Medvedev.

Kudrin said he had asked for a meeting himself, as he wanted to invite the prime minister to a dinner at the World Economic Forum in Davos next year.

Medvedev described the meeting in his interview with Kommersant last month, saying the two were "discussing work" over a cup of tea.

During the meeting, Kudrin recalled that Medvedev had ousted him from the government "exactly a year ago," the prime minister said.

Kudrin was fired by then-president Medvedev in September 2011 after saying that he disagreed with the Kremlin's economic policy and that he would refuse a position in a new Cabinet if it were chaired by Medvedev.

Kudrin, who was widely seen as the most likely candidate to chair the Cabinet, made his comments following Putin's announcement that he would appoint Medvedev to the position if elected for a third term.

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