

Vice Presidential Post Mulled to Ensure Power Transition

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Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu is a potential candidate for the post of vice president. **Denis Abramov**

Editor's note: This article was an April Fools' Day story.

A group of President Vladimir Putin's advisors are considering reintroducing the position of vice president — a move that might create conditions for a smooth transition of power to Putin's presumed successor.

"There are a lot of downsides to it, since we don't want to return to the situation with Rutskoi," said a Kremlin official who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter. But he added that Putin is "interested in the idea."

The official was referring to Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, a veteran of the Afghanistan war who turned against President Boris Yeltsin during the bloody standoff between the president and parliament in 1993.

The vice presidential post, held by Rutskoi from 1991 to 1993, was not included in the new

Constitution passed after Yeltsin won a victory in that struggle.

The position of vice president also existed in the Soviet Union's last years. It was held by Gennady Yanayev, who took part in a coup attempt against President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991.

The Constitution is perceived by many analysts as giving the president enormous powers that can potentially be used to stifle the opposition.

A high-ranking United Russia official said that the move might be aimed at ensuring a smooth succession of power after Putin's current presidential term expires in 2018.

"I think this post, if it is really created, is a way to ensure power transition to some heavyweight like Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu," he said.

He also named Presidential Chief of Staff Sergei Ivanov and Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin as among the likely candidates.

The post of prime minister has usually been seen as a stepping stone to the presidency. But the creation of a vice presidential position would weaken incumbent Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's possible presidential bid, analysts said.

The official said that if someone like Shoigu becomes vice president, "it will send the right signal to the elite."

"It would show that Putin is ready to leave and the vice presidential post would allow Shoigu to be elected president, given his popularity," he said.

The office of Shoigu, who presided over large-scale military exercises in the Black Sea, was not available for comment. A Defense Ministry source called the possibility of his boss becoming vice president "rubbish."

The proposals on reintroducing the post were expected to be submitted to the president by April 1, the official said.

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