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Russian Prime Minister: Ukraine Has 'No Industry, or State'

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Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev denounced Ukraine as having “neither industry, nor a state,” according to remarks published Monday on the Cabinet website.

Medvedev was responding to a comment by an industry watchdog official, who compared mortality rates at Russia's coal mines with those in Ukraine, in an attempt to defend Russia's mining mortality rates.

Speaking in the wake of a series of deadly mine explosions earlier this year, head of the industry watchdog Rostekhnadzor Alexei Alyoshin said that in 2015, Russia's mining mortality rates totaled “0.053 people per a million tons [of coal produced].”

The rate was “in line with the numbers of developed coal-producing countries,” and the lowest in the history of Russia and of the Soviet Union, Alyoshin said in a meeting with

Medvedev in Siberia's coal-mining region of Kemerovo.

But when Alyoshin went on to compare the rate with that of Ukraine — where he said mining mortality reached nearly 1.2 people per million ton of coal — Medvedev cut in, and the following exchange ensued:

"What's the point of making parallels with Ukraine in that sense," Medvedev said.

"I'm [citing the data] for the sake of comparison," Alyoshin responded, according to the transcript.

"Well, no, I'm just saying there is neither industry, nor a state there," Medvedev said.

Alyoshin tried to defend his statistics, arguing the numbers dated back to 2013 — the year before Ukraine plunged into war in the east, between Russian-backed insurgents and the Kiev government.

Medvedev came right back: "In 2013? There was industry there, but there was no state even then."

Since street demonstrations began in 2013 by European-minded Ukrainians, Moscow has denounced the protest movement as an illegal revolt, and its endurance as the failure of a weak — or non-existent — state.

Russian officials have long derided Ukraine's statehood — viewing the former Soviet republic as Moscow's backyard. Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly told then-U.S. President George W. Bush during the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest that "Ukraine is not even a state!"

Russia's mining safety, which was a subject of the meeting in Kemerovo, has repeatedly been called into question.

A series of mine explosions in the northwest republic of Komi killed 36 people in February. The blasts were attributed to methane gas explosions.

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