

U.S. President-Elect Trump Is Full of 'Sensible Ideas': The Best of Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's 2016 Press Conference

By [Katie Marie Davies](#)

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Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has faced off with the country's top reporters in a special televised press conference.

Medvedev was interviewed by journalists from three state news outlets — Valery Fadeyev from Channel One, Sergey Brilev, from Channel Rossiya and Irada Zeynalova from NTV — alongside RBC's Elmar Murtazaev. The Moscow Times Editor-in-Chief Mikhail Fishman was also in attendance to represent the independent Dozhd television channel.

The Moscow Times has picked out the top highlights.

Russia's Economy: GDP Falling, But More Defence Spending

Medvedev admitted that Russia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was expected to decline by 0.5 percent by the end of 2016. But the Prime Minister was quick to stress that the country was making big investments in healthcare, car manufacturing, and the country's "import substitution program," designed to soften the blow of Western sanctions. Russia's agriculture market grew by 3 percent, he said, thanks to a record harvest and the government's boycott on Western food products.

In response to tough questions on unprecedented defense spending, Medvedev said the funding would provide millions of Russian with jobs and boost the country's economy. The Prime Minister told the reporters that Russia currently earns \$17 billion from arms sales annually.

Medvedev was also keen to appease Russia's elderly, having accidentally told a Crimean pensioner in May that there was "no money" to raise pensions. Russia's elderly, he said at the time, should just "hang in there." Medvedev said that 7 trillion rubles (\$112.8 billion) had been put aside for Russia's 43 million pensioners, promising that payments would be indexed by more than 5 percent in 2017.

The Kremlin wouldn't rest until Russia's GDP had "surpassed the rest of the world," the Prime Minister said.

More from The Moscow Times: [Russia's wheat kings enjoy a bumper harvest.](#)

Trump: 'Sensible and Pragmatic'

Medvedev praised U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, claiming that his ideas seemed "sensible."

Trump's presumed Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and advisor Elon Musk were also lauded by the Prime Minister for their "pragmatism" and "lack of innate anti-Russian stereotypes."

Russia-U.S. relations have deteriorated in recent years, Medvedev claimed — but in the Prime Minister's view, the blame lies solely with the Americans.

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Corruption, Sport and Doping

Reporters questioned Medvedev on Russia's biggest 2016 corruption scandal, the arrest of Economy Minister Alexei Ulyukayev. The official was arrested in November on suspicion of extorting a \$2 million bribe from Russian energy giant Rosneft.

The Prime Minister condemned the "sad event" as "beyond his understanding," but said that the trial should not turn into a media spectacle.

Medvedev had more sympathetic words for former Russian Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko, who found himself at the center of Russia's doping scandal. A major report by the World Anti-

Doping Agency (WADA) in July alleged that Russian security services had carried out a widespread state-backed doping program at Russia's 2014 Winter Olympics.

The claims eventually saw Russia's Paralympic athlete's barred from the 2016 Paralympic Games. Rather than face Kremlin disapproval, Mutko was promoted to Deputy Prime Minister in October.

Medvedev dismissed the report's findings as "funny," but went on to condemn the Paralympic ban calling it "immoral." The Prime Minister called for the formulation of a "legally perfect" definition of doping.

More from The Moscow Times: [Why is Russia's ruling elite really afraid of the Ulyukayev case?](#)

Russian President Vladimir Putin will face a similar event next week, with journalists meeting the Russian leader at Moscow's World Trade Center.

Follow Putin's press conference live in English with The Moscow Times live blog, online on Dec. 22.

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