

The Russian Federation's new Minister of Defence

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On 6 November, President Vladimir Putin dismissed Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, who had held that position since 2007. At the same time he appointed Sergei Shoigu, the governor of the Moscow region, to the post; several years earlier he was the minister for emergency situations. Serdyukov's dismissal has been linked to the results of an investigation, in which the prime suspects are high-ranking Defence Ministry officials, *protégés* of the former head of the Ministry (one of them has been arrested). Serdyukov is to be a witness in proceedings concerning fraud and the embezzlement of state property in *Oboronservis*, a company established as part of the privatisation of the Russian Federation (RF)'s Armed Forces.

Commentary

- Although information embarrassing to Serdyukov has been in the public space for several months, his resignation is a rather extraordinary incident. A key minister in the Russian government, a member of the Security Council, a member of Putin's inner circle, and an in-law of former Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov, Serdyukov is departing in an atmosphere of a public scandal. One reason for Putin's decision may be an attempt to demonstrate that he is exercising effective control over the key ministries and is taking the key decisions. This activity may be seen as the president's reaction to the deterioration of the political situation, i.e. increasing criticism of his policies, and the increasing severity of the disputes among the ruling elite.
- Serdyukov was unpopular with the military. His appointment in February 2007 – as a civilian with no military experience – was poorly received by the command staff. However, his time in office saw a wide-ranging reform of the RF's Armed Forces, which was implemented relatively effectively, including the most difficult part – the liquidation of bases and equipment inherited from the Soviet army. At the same time, together with an increase in Russia's military spending, the Ministry of Defence under Serdyukov entered into a dispute with the military-industrial complex (known by the Russian abbreviation of *OPK*). The Ministry did not want to incur the costs of modernising the defence industry, and – by ceasing to purchase weaponry which did not meet the Army's requirements – indirectly contributed to the weakening of many arms businesses which for various reasons had not invested in modernisation, or had undertaken it too slowly.

This dispute was exacerbated after Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin took control of the *OPK*. Serdyukov's dismissal should be seen as consistent with the interests of the defence industry.

- Sergei Shoigu distinguished himself as an efficient head of the ministry for emergency situations (which he ran from 1994 until this May). His appointment is intended to calm the situation within the Ministry of Defence: the reforms of the RF's Armed Forces (which have still not been completed), and the process of devising an agreement between the army and defence industry on the huge sums of money which have been allocated to technical modernisation (about US\$700 billion in 2011-2020). We should not expect the reform of the army to be slowed down; any changes in its plans (which have been drawn up by the General Staff, and are supported by the younger part of the senior ranks); or any significant changes in the high command of the RF's Armed Forces. But nor can we rule out the possibility that under General Shoigu, Serdyukov's civilian collaborators will leave the Ministry, and that financial issues in the department will once again come under the supervision of the military. Most likely, the Ministry of Defence will become financially involved in modernising the *OPK* to a greater extent than before. This could mean bigger purchases of weapons, or the acquisition of models which it had previously been uninterested in. Such weaponry would make up over 10% percent of the Armed Forces' total purchases.

Cooperation: **Jadwiga Rogoża, Piotr Żochowski**