

Medvedev's government, Putin's ideas

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On 21 May, President Vladimir Putin approved the structure and composition of Dmitri Medvedev's government. Although three-quarters of the ministers have been replaced, this is in fact a continuation of the previous government, because most of the new cabinet's members had held second-tier roles in the government of Vladimir Putin. Several ministers who for years have been loyal and efficient in implementing Putin's policy priorities have retained their positions, including the foreign minister Sergey Lavrov and the defence minister Anatoly Sierdiukov.

The formation and composition of the government clearly shows that the final word on personnel policy still belongs to Vladimir Putin, who is mainly counting on tried and true officials who have no independent political positions. In this system Prime Minister Medvedev's autonomy is strongly limited; this is reflected, among other things, by his failure to push more than a few of his close associates into government jobs. Under Medvedev, the government is returning to its role as a subordinate body to the president. It will be forced to implement the political and economic priorities of Putin's elite and the lobbyists associated with them, and at the same time, it can be used to take responsibility for any serious economic and social problems which may arise.

A superficial change of personnel

Many ministers are leaving the government; they are moving *en masse* to the Presidential Administration, mostly to become advisers to the President. Dmitri Medvedev's government is made up of new (and younger) ministers. However, many of them were deputy ministers in Putin's government (including the new heads of the departments of finance, energy, economic development, industry and trade), or have otherwise worked with the former prime minister before. Hitherto these new ministers had performed minor roles, although they have all been verified and trusted by Putin. Of the new appointments, it is worth noting the nomination of General Vladimir Kolokoltsev as head of the Interior Ministry; he has the reputation of a professional with extensive experience working within the Ministry's structures, including in Moscow (the Interior Ministry may play an important role in the next few years, especially in the context of the growing mood of public protest).

There are two new positions in the government: a minister for development of the Far East and a minister for 'open government', the latter being a project to enable online public

consultation on government projects. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Policy has been broken up into a separate Department of Health and a Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

The small number of 'Medvedev's' people in the government includes Arkady Dvorkovich, his advisor from his time as president; Dvorkovich has now become deputy prime minister for economy and energy. Another is Mikhail Abyzov, who will head the 'open government' project.

A technical government under Kremlin control

Most of the government appointments show that when Vladimir Putin decided on its composition, he aimed to form a cabinet which was not very politically independent, thus ensuring the continuation of the policy carried out over recent years. Certain 'proven' ministers are retaining their positions, such as the foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, who for years has been effectively carrying out government policy on the international arena, as well as the defence minister Anatoly Serdyukov, who has been reforming the Russian armed forces with firm backing from Putin. The appointments to the major economic ministries also indicate a desire to continue the current economic policy.

The weak political positions of many of the new ministers, and of Prime Minister Medvedev himself, indicate that apart from the President's constitutional powers for influencing the government, informal mechanisms operated by lobbyists close to Putin will also operate. This is well illustrated by the balance of power in the energy sphere. The new deputy premier coordinating this sector is Medvedev's advisor Arkady Dvorkovich. He has taken over the powerful position previously held by Igor Sechin, one of the leading representatives of Putin's elite. However, Dvorkovich's political position in the elite is incomparably weaker than Sechin's, and this may determine how much real influence he will have on the economy and energy. Despite his departure from the government, Sechin remains one of the key players in the oil sector. He was the head of Rosneft, and is the president's candidate to join the supervisory board of Rosneftegaz, the structure which controls a 75% stake in Rosneft and a stake of approximately 11% in Gazprom. In addition, on the same day the government was confirmed, President Putin issued a decree in which he placed the so-called 'golden share' in Rosneft, which belongs to the state, on the list of strategic companies which are not to be privatised. This decision is in Sechin's interest, as he has supported maintaining state control over the company. The move also demonstrates the limited influence of Medvedev, who as president called for a broader process of privatisation, including of the energy sector.

Medvedev's 'technical' government will therefore work for the political and economic priorities of Putin's elite. One of the final signals of this is Dmitri Medvedev's takeover – under an agreement with Vladimir Putin – of the leadership of the United Russia party. The Prime Minister has joined the party, and should be elected its leader at its convention on 26 May.

Appendix

Dmitri Medvedev's government

Deputy prime ministers

Igor Shuvalov – first deputy prime minister

Vladislav Surkov – deputy prime minister, head of the Prime Minister's Office

Dmitri Kozak – deputy prime minister for the regions and the 2014 Winter Olympics

Aleksandr Khloponin – deputy prime minister for the North Caucasus

Dmitri Rogozin – deputy prime minister for the armed forces

Arkady Dvorkovich – deputy prime minister for the economy, industry and energy

Olga Golodiec – deputy prime minister for social affairs

The new ministers

Aleksandr Novak – minister of energy (from 2008, deputy finance minister in Putin's government; worked closely with Igor Sechin, the former deputy prime minister for energy)

Denis Manturov – minister of industry and trade (from 2007, deputy minister of industry and energy; from 2008 deputy minister of industry and trade. A trusted associate of Sergei Chemyezov, the head of the Rostekhnologii state corporation)

Sergei Donskoy – minister of natural resources and ecology (from 2008, deputy minister in this department)

Andrei Belousov – minister for economic development (from 2008, deputy minister of economy and development in Putin's government)

Vladimir Kolokoltsev – interior minister (from 2009, head of the main internal affairs office for Moscow)

Vladimir Puchkov – minister for emergencies (has worked in this department since 1997)

Veronika Skvortsova – health minister (from 2008, deputy health minister)

Maksim Topilin – minister of labour and social policy (from 2008, deputy minister of health and social policy)

Nikolai Fyodorov – minister of agriculture (former governor of Chuvashia; author of the programme of the pro-Putin All-Russian National Front)

Vladimir Miedinski – minister of culture (professor at the esteemed MGIMO university, an ideologue of the United Russia party)

Nikolai Nikiforov – minister for communications (the youngest minister at 29 years old; from 2010, he was deputy prime minister and minister of communications in the Republic of Tatarstan)

Dmitri Livanov – minister of education (rector of the Moscow Steel and Alloys Institute)

Oleg Govorun – minister for regional development (former presidential envoy to the Central Federal District, and head of domestic policy in the President's Administration)

Maksim Sokolov – minister of transport (from 2009, worked in the prime minister's office)

Victor Ishayev – minister for development for the far east (former presidential envoy to the Far Eastern Federal District, and former governor of Khabarovsk region)

Mikhail Abyzov – minister for 'open government' (has a background in business, and was an advisor to President Medvedev from January 2012)

Ministers remaining in their posts

Sergei Lavrov – minister of foreign affairs

Anatoly Serdyukov – defence minister

Anton Siluanov – finance minister

Alexander Konovalov – minister of justice

Vitaly Mutko – minister for sport

Ministers leaving the government

Head of the Prime Minister's Office Anton Vaino – becomes deputy head of the President's Administration (PA)

Putin's government spokesman Dmitri Peskov – becomes presidential spokesman for the PA

Transport minister Igor Levitin – becomes adviser to the president (PA)

Communications minister Igor Shchogolev – becomes adviser to the president (PA)

Natural resources minister Yuri Trutnev – becomes adviser to the president (PA)

Health minister Tatyana Golikova – becomes adviser to the president (PA)

Economic development minister Elvira Nabiullina – becomes adviser to the president (PA)

Education minister Andrei Fursenko – becomes adviser to the president (PA)

Interior minister Rashid Nurgaliev – becomes deputy secretary of the Security Council