

The Russian president appoints special representatives in the para-states

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On 16 March, President Dmitry Medvedev appointed a special representative for Abkhazia. This will be Alexander Tkachev, governor of Krasnodar Krai, which neighbours on Abkhazia. In turn, on 21 March, Medvedev nominated representatives for South Ossetia (the leader of North Ossetia, Taymuraz Mamsurov) and for Transnistria (Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin). No details have been revealed of the competences the representatives will have. It is known only that they will control the flow of Russian budget funds to the para-states among other things. Russian aid forms a significant part of local budgets in all three para-states (the largest in South Ossetia).

Moscow has recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, and has embassies there. In turn, it formally recognises Transnistria as a part of Moldova. The nominations of the representatives, as being contrary to international practice, has been sharply criticised by Chisinau. Tbilisi also has taken an unequivocally negative stance on them.

Commentary

- The nominations of the Kremlin's representatives in the three post-Soviet para-states are proof of the desire to integrate them even more strongly with Russia (including ongoing incorporation into the Russian economic and legal space). They also fit in with the extension of the integration processes in the post-Soviet area under Moscow's leadership, which has been announced by President-Elect Vladimir Putin. The nominations were arbitrary and were not preceded by any consultations (for example, with Chisinau). The fact that the leaders of the neighbouring Russian regions have been appointed representatives for Abkhazia and South Ossetia may also prove that, contrary to rhetoric, Moscow treats the two para-states as extensions of its own territory.
- In the case of Transnistria, it seems that the appointment of the representative is a form of pressure being put on Chisinau (Moscow demands that Moldova should respect its interests in the Transnistrian peace process and is also increasingly anxious about Moldova becoming closer to the EU). One proof of this may be the choice of representative – Dmitry Rogozin. He had supported the recognition of Transnistria by Russia in the past. He was simultaneously nominated head of the commission for economic co-operation with Moldova.

- The decision to appoint the representatives could also have been dictated by the desire to tighten control of the para-states themselves. Despite their very strong influence and real instruments (for example, in the form of military presence), the candidates backed by Moscow sustained painful defeats in all the elections which have been held over the past few months in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria (the candidate backed by Moscow did not even qualify for the runoff in the repeated presidential election in South Ossetia on 25 March). The funds sent from Moscow were embezzled on numerous occasions in the para-states in the past.
- The fact that this controversial decision has been taken by the outgoing president, Dmitry Medvedev, could be an effect of concern for the image of President-Elect Vladimir Putin, with whom these nominations have been consulted beyond any doubt.

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