

Russian Federation: Conference by President Medvedev – a loss of face

On May 18, President Dmitri Medvedev took part in a press conference with 800 Russian and foreign journalists in the Skolkovo Centre for Innovation, which is currently under construction. The President's first large press conference was accompanied by expectations of an important electoral declaration. However, the conference may be considered to be a loss of face for Medvedev: he made no substantial political statement, and his appearance only reinforced the belief that his autonomy in important policy issues is limited.

It was expected that Medvedev would announce his decision as to whether he would stand in the upcoming presidential elections. However the President, who had earlier signalled his interest in being re-elected (whereas Prime Minister Putin had stressed the need to hold back from taking such a decision), made no such declaration, merely noting in a general fashion that this decision would be taken at a time when the conditions are favourable. The President also distanced himself from questions about the possibility of the dismissal of the Prime Minister or other ministers, noting only that while the President has such powers, the government is acting in a 'harmonious' (he has not sacked any minister of Putin's government, despite numerous scandals and abuses). The President did not even try to put a brave face on the more light-hearted questions which are traditionally asked at such conferences; he appeared to behave in a forced, tense manner.

Medvedev's press conference has not settled any of the important political issues. At the same time, the President's defensive attitude once again confirms that he must be operating according to the rules established by Vladimir Putin, who is setting the tone for the entire election campaign. <JR>