

Russian Federation: President Medvedev intervenes in the dispute between government departments of force

On 21 February, President Medvedev sacked the Deputy Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB), General Vyacheslav Ushakov. His dismissal is the result of a conflict between the FSB and the Prosecutor General, against a background of accusations by the FSB that prosecutors have been concealing illegal gambling activity. Medvedev has used the conflict to take the role of arbitrator and settle the disputes between the government departments of force.

Ushakov was one of six deputy directors of the FSB; he supervised the investigative bodies and the FSB's press office. The Russian media have directly linked his dismissal to recent leaks concerning allegations by the FSB against the leadership of the Prosecutor's Office in Moscow. The FSB has discovered illegal casinos in several cities in the Moscow region, and has taken possession of evidence proving a link between the prosecutors (including the head of the prosecutor's office in the Moscow region) and criminal gambling syndicates. This would support President Medvedev's position, as he stated that the pressure from the media on the investigation into this case is unacceptable.

The scandal concerning criminal gambling syndicates should be seen as a failure of the plan by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin who, two years ago, ordered the prohibition of gambling in Russia. Nor can it be ruled out that by accusing the prosecutors, the FSB has made a preventative move, presumably to distract similar suspicions from their own officers – a move which in the Kremlin's assessment threatened open conflict between the two government departments. In this context, President Medvedev's reaction should be seen as an attempt to discipline the government departments of force. <MZ>