

Russian Federation: the Kremlin makes concessions to the local elite in Yakutia.

On 31 May, President Dmitri Medvedev accepted the resignation of the governor of Yakutia, Vyacheslav Shtyrov, two years before the end of the latter's term in office. Shtyrov's successor will probably be Aysen Nikolayev, who represents the younger generation of Yakutia's political and business elite. The governor's resignation, which was most probably caused by his conflict with the local elite, is an unprecedented move, and shows the boundaries which the Kremlin may be running into in the regions.

Yakutia is the largest and one of the most sparsely inhabited regions of Russia. It has rich deposits of diamonds (97% of Russian diamond production, and 25% of the whole world's, is in the hands of the Yakutia-based company Alrosa), as well as oil, gas and coal. Vyacheslav Shtyrov, a politician and businessman from that region, became head of the republic in 2002, thanks to Moscow's support; in 2006 he was nominated by then-President Putin for a second term. Under the rule of Shtyrov, who came out as a defender of the Kremlin's interests, the interests of big Russian businesses such as Surgutneftegaz and Myechel were strengthened in Yakutia. This led to a serious conflict between the governor and the local elite, who were dissatisfied by this expansion.

Shtyrov's resignation is the first departure of a governor appointed by the Kremlin before the end of his term (in 2008, the Kremlin decided to fire the governor of the Irkutsk region, who had been appointed three years previously) – a move which has resulted not from a decision by Moscow, but by the dissatisfaction of a regional elite. The Kremlin's agreement to withdraw a loyal governor shows that in the case of important and powerful regions, Moscow is obliged to consider the interests of the local elites. <JR>