

Medvedev Might Not Be So Liberal After All

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Two recent actions by President Dmitry Medvedev cast a pall over his credentials as a liberal modernizer and a crusader against corruption.

Medvedev's reappointment of Yury Chaika to another five-year term as prosecutor general is hard to comprehend given the monstrous corruption scandal engulfing the agency. The Investigative Committee has opened criminal cases into senior Moscow region prosecutors on suspicion that they offered protection to an illegal, flourishing gambling business.

The problem is not that Chaika failed to notice the widespread illegal activity within his agency (which is hard to believe), but that senior prosecutors under his supervision actively sought to thwart the investigation. In any modern nation, even a whiff of such a scandal would have meant a swift resignation for Chaika and an end to his career.

Medvedev's reappointment of Chaika puts in doubt the president's commitment to his anti-

corruption agenda. It shows that Medvedev is, at best, inconsistent and, at worst, hypocritical. It has helped undermine the public trust in the president, as a recent Levada poll shows.

Then there was Medvedev's clumsy attempt to remove St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko and appoint her speaker of the Federation Council, a power the president does not legally have under the Constitution.

The problem is not that this action discredits an important state institution; after all, the Federation Council is a motley crew of demoted governors and sulking billionaires. The problem is that Medvedev misled the public. Matviyenko failed as governor. Had Medvedev fired her, as he did with Mayor Yury Luzhkov, he would have come across as a crusader against bad government. But Medvedev opted for an obvious ruse.

This runs counter to his calls for more decentralization and government accountability. One day he complains that the system needs fixing because the Kremlin can't effectively manage and control everything. The next day he announces decisions only an emperor could make.

It is hard to figure out where the real Medvedev is. He says one thing and then does the opposite. He is all over the place.

Putin is different, however. At least he does what he says, and you know what to expect from him, even though you might not like it.

We now know who Mr. Putin is. But who is the real Mr. Medvedev?

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