

Media Reforms Should Begin With Gazprom

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Do as I say, not as I do,”

Is that what President Dmitry Medvedev is telling us about his new media plan? He released the new proposals at a meeting of the St. Petersburg Dialogue held July 19 in Hannover. The plan is to get the government out of the media business and create a public television channel.

Medvedev especially wants to get rid of regional government media bosses. But what about the Kremlin-controlled media based in Moscow? If the president truly wants the government out of the media business, he should lead by example. The Kremlin-tethered outlets should be the first ones to go.

Medvedev explained to his audience, “If media sources [in the regions] receive money from the regional leadership, they start to serve its interests and turn into a mouthpiece for one person or several people.”

His description hits the nail on the head. Paradoxically, when it comes to the Kremlin-controlled media, Medvedev is mum.

Medvedev, however, seems fixated on the regional media. “It would be a lot better if they existed independently,” he told the Hanover gathering.

Medvedev’s new plan sounds a lot like his old media plan, which he presented during his state-of-the-nation address in November. Basically, the plan was to get the government out of the media business, but the government is still in there. The plan appears to have failed.

His new plan is essentially the same as his old one except for the addition of the public television proposal. Medvedev is great at making plans, but now he should concentrate on making sure that they bear fruit.

Medvedev should break up and sell Gazprom-Media properties. Before becoming president, Medvedev was one of the media overlords whom he now disdains. As chairman of Gazprom, he held ultimate control of Gazprom-Media, owner of a flock of major broadcast and print outlets.

To be sure, a Gazprom-Media sell-off wouldn’t be easy. Neither will the eradication of political control over the regional media. But breaking up Gazprom-Media is something that Medvedev can initiate tomorrow. It would be a giant step in the right direction. It would demonstrate clearly that he’s capable of producing more than just compelling ideas.

It would be an example of strong leadership by example.

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