

Medvedev Approves Federation Council Reform

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President Dmitry Medvedev on Monday approved a delicate reform of the Federation Council that makes it easier for senators to keep their posts during changes in regional leaderships.

The reform stipulates that sitting senators need not pass through any additional procedures if they seek reappointment after their governor leaves office or their regional parliament dissolves, Medvedev said during a meeting with Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko.

Each region currently sends two senators to the upper house of parliament, one being appointed by the regional parliament, the other by the governor.

Senators' terms are bound to their appointing organs' terms, meaning that they automatically lose office if their governor's or regional legislature's term ends.

Under a reform initiated under Medvedev earlier this year, in order to become a senator, candidates need to have been elected to a legislature. Monday's reform does away with this requirement for sitting senators.

Medvedev argued that "often enough" governors' or parliaments' terms end early. "This makes life easier and optimizes the work of the council," he [said](#), according to a transcript on the Kremlin's web site.

The new law was lobbied by Matviyenko, who assumed the speaker's post last month after being appointed senator following a stint since 2003 as the governor of St. Petersburg.

The move drew protests after it became known that she would run as councilwoman in two St. Petersburg city districts for the ruling United Russia party only on the last day that parties could put forward candidates, prompting the opposition to complain that the elections, both of which she won with more than 95 percent, were deeply unfair.

Medvedev also said he wants the Federation Council and Matviyenko to work on a sweeping overhaul of financial relations between regional governments and the federal government.

The new delineation of competences should increase local authorities' motivation to increase their regions' own income, he said.

Matviyenko promised to carry out the reforms and said the Federation Council should become "a lift for regional legislative initiatives," explaining that the regions often could not achieve this because of "complicated bureaucratic decision-making machineries."

She also promised to radically reduce the number of parliamentary committees to 10. "Twenty-seven committees and commissions — that is a lot for 166 Federation Council members," she said.

The reduction plan has been met with opposition from some senators bound to lose influential committee positions, national media reported last week.

Sergei Mironov, founder of the Just Russia party, who was ousted from his post as Federation Council speaker earlier this year, said Monday that the real reason for reducing committees was to make it easier for Matviyenko to rule over the lawmakers. It would be simpler to rule over 10 committee chairmen than the current 27, he said, Interfax reported.

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