

How Medvedev Can Still Save His Legacy

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Regardless of the final results for United Russia, which he led in Sunday's elections, President Dmitry Medvedev needs to think hard about his place in Russian history.

This is because history could be merciless to him for his willing role in a cynical private deal that traded the institution of the presidency like a piece of furniture.

Whatever the good things he has done or intends to do, from a historical perspective he would be held against a hard judgment that his presidency might have been a fake, a cover for an otherwise unconstitutional arrangement for Vladimir Putin's uninterrupted stay in power.

Barely two months after his voluntary abdication, it is striking how quickly his one-term presidency is dissipating.

Economic modernization and political liberalization, which were the defining themes of Medvedev's presidency, are barely mentioned. Putin in his October television interview downplayed both. During the State Duma campaign, Medvedev and United Russia were

running on a platform of stability, not change. Nor have they or their presidential nominee, Putin, outlined a viable plan for the country's future. Medvedev even backtracked on his anti-corruption drive, refusing to endorse a proposal for public disclosure of spending by bureaucrats.

The president has allowed his foreign policy agenda of "modernization alliances" with the West to be hijacked and scuttled by unscrupulous political hacks who mask their incompetence and mission failure with populist rants that harm Russia's interests.

There is little consensus on what Medvedev's future might be.

German political analyst Alexander Rahr says Medvedev could still be a powerful prime minister with considerable leeway both in forming his own government team and implementing a bold reformist program.

Sergei Belanovsky, an analyst with the Center for Strategic Development, argues that Medvedev is a political dead man walking, a drain on the legitimacy of a Putin regime that needs to dump him quickly and find a competent economic manager to serve as prime minister.

Others think Medvedev would be merely a frontman, a youthful cheerleader for a decaying regime.

But there is one thing Medvedev can still do in his remaining months in office to secure a decent legacy and perhaps salvage his political comeback. He needs to enact a constitutional amendment limiting each mortal Russian to only two presidential terms for life.

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