

Putin Pledges to Fight Own Legacy

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin proposed a radical rollback of his own social and fiscal policies in a draft of his presidential program, which touts economic modernization and strengthening rule of law.

Analysts pointed out that most of the problems Putin wants to tackle flourished during his own decade-plus in power, but praised him for at least acknowledging that they exist.

But they also stressed that not too much importance should be placed on the program — whose actual author remains unknown — saying Russian voters typically focus on a candidates' actions, not policy platforms.

Putin himself offered little change in his usual electoral habits, reiterating this week that he is unlikely to join in debates with other candidates, in keeping with his two previous Kremlin campaigns in 2000 and 2004.

If elected on March 4, Putin said in his draft program published online Thursday, he will curb

heavy-handed tendencies of law enforcement, ease criminal punishments and even give more economic freedom to the regions.

He will also take a page from President Dmitry Medvedev's book by working to modernize the economy and improve the business climate, according to the document, which appeared on Putin's newly launched campaign web site Putin2012.ru.

"We have to revise the whole system of protecting public interests, giving up its overly repressive angle. This situation is misshaping our society, making it morally unsound," the program said.

It also said Putin's future government will create 25 million new jobs by 2032 and raise foreign investment to 25 percent of gross domestic product from the current 20 percent.

The full draft of the program contains six chapters, dealing with topics such as the economy, social spending and international affairs.

Putin's representatives said earlier this week that the prime minister spent the whole New Year's holiday working on the presidential program — his first in years — writing it by hand.

Oddly, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that the program released on Putin2012.ru is not Putin's personal platform that he penned himself, but rather a document created by his party, United Russia.

Putin's own program is to be presented by Feb. 12, Peskov said, according to Interfax.

The document on Putin2012.ru is tagged with the logo of the All-Russia People's Front, an election group affiliated with United Russia that many analysts speculated would provide the foundation for Putin's Kremlin campaign.

Putin's statement cited on the site calls it "a base program, an edited collection of the populace's requests ... that still needs to be reworked by experts, but still serves ... as a good, correct and powerful landmark."

Peskov also said the program has many points in common with Putin's personal one, but did not elaborate.

The current proposal is open to public feedback on the Putin2012.ru web site.

But a significant number of comments so far have been critical or outright hostile, with many urging Putin — with varying degrees of politeness — to give up his bid and step down.

"People are tired of you and your team. Just leave," one suggestion said. The BBC reported Thursday that the comments are vigorously moderated, with posts by all serious offenders deleted from the site.

Though still an unquestioned favorite in the Kremlin race, Putin faces a turbulent political situation, prompted by the wave of mass protests in Moscow in December.

The protests, the biggest of their kind since 1993, were sparked by allegations of rampant

voting fraud in the State Duma elections, but also targeted Putin, whose United Russia party won a majority.

Observers say the protests largely stem from middle-class fatigue with Putin. Many issues he has pledged to tackle emerged during his time in the Kremlin, among them a promise to soften criminal legislation and rein in law enforcement. Human rights activists said the number of prisoners in the country has increased significantly during Putin's time in power.

Putin's "power vertical," which gave increased control to bureaucrats of all stripes while removing many checks and balances between state agencies, is also credited with promoting corruption and spoiling the business environment.

As a result, capital outflow increased more than 2 1/2 times last year to reach \$84.2 billion, the Central Bank said, RIA-Novosti [reported](#) Thursday.

This is not the first promise of a rollback of Putin's reforms that the December protests have prompted. Putin and Medvedev earlier discussed reintroducing direct gubernatorial elections, banned in 2004, and softening the strict rules for registering political parties and presidential candidates.

Some of Putin's loyalists, including Duma Deputy Sergei Mironov, former head of the Federation Council, and ex-Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin have also called on him to begin a dialogue with protesters, but he has yet to agree.

It remains to be seen how many promises will actually be implemented if Putin returns to the Kremlin, said Pavel Salin, an expert at the Center for Political Conjecture.

Violating campaign promises involves little risk for Putin because the public is not paying much attention to them to begin with, Salin told The Moscow Times by telephone.

Gazeta.ru commentator Georgi Osipov voiced skepticism about the program, saying in an [article](#) Thursday that the industrialization plan proposed by Putin would result in "either militarization and stagnation of the economy or simply stagnation" unless a real effort is made to stop bureaucrats from interfering with businesses.

It also is unclear how Putin will promote his program. His spokesman said Thursday that the prime minister would most likely not participate in televised debates with his rivals.

Putin would not debate because it would require him to put his work in the government on hold, Peskov told Interfax.

Putin already pledged in December to stay away from debates, but said he would field his "younger brothers" in them instead. He never elaborated, and neither did Peskov, who only said Thursday that Putin is considering possible replacement debaters.

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