

Amid Protests, Putin Sworn In for Third Presidential Term

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Vladimir Putin taking the oath of office at his inauguration ceremony Monday. **Vladimir Rodionov**

Vladimir Putin on Monday said the country was entering a fundamentally new stage of development as he was sworn into office for a third term as president, amid street protests against his rule in central Moscow.

After a change in the constitution initiated by his predecessor Dmitry Medvedev, Putin will be president for six years instead of the previously instituted term of four years. Putin, who served as president from 2000 to 2008, was prime minister during Medvedev's presidency and served in that post until his inauguration Monday.

Putin was sworn into office just after noon by Constitutional Court head Valery Zorkin in a brief ceremony in the Kremlin.

After taking the oath of office, Putin gave a 5-minute speech in which he said the country

faced problems of "a new nature and scale," referring indirectly to areas of concern and ambition he has touched on frequently in recent months, including Russia's oil-based economy, demographic problems, development of the Far East and the country's role as a regional leader.

"And we all must understand that the lives of future generations, the historical prospective of government and our nation, depend now on us, on actual successes in the creation of a new economy and modern standards of living, on our efforts to care for people and support Russian families, on our persistence in developing the enormous Russian expanses from the Baltic to the Pacific Ocean, on our ability to become leaders and a center of attraction in all of Eurasia," Putin said.

As he has in the past, Putin expressed his commitment to democratic principles and said Russia should be "successful" and respected in the world.

"We want and will live in a democratic country, where everyone has the freedom and space to contribute talent and labor, his efforts," Putin said. The country should be a "reliable, open, honest and predictable partner," he said.

Speaking before Putin was sworn in, Medvedev said he thought it was important to continue in the direction he had tried to take the country as president.

"Only in that way will we build a strong democratic government, where the law and social justice triumph, where security is ensured, where opportunities are created for a person's self-actualization, of his entrepreneurial, civil and creative initiatives," Medvedev said, according to a transcript of the speech posted on the Kremlin website.

He said he worked as president "openly and honestly, in the interests of people, doing everything so that people are free."

Around 3,000 government leaders and prominent figures filled multiple halls of the Grand Kremlin Palace for the ceremony, including runner-up presidential candidate Mikhail Prokhorov, Russian Orthodox Church head Patriarch Kirill, and former Italian Prime Minister and Putin's personal friend Silvio Berlusconi. Federation Council speaker Valentina Matvienko and State Duma speaker Sergei Naryshkin stood on stage with Putin and Medvedev during the swearing-in ceremony.

At the conclusion of Putin's speech, the newly sworn-in president kissed his rarely seen wife Lyudmila and Medvedev's wife Svetlana, seated next to each other in the front row with Kirill, and walked down a winding red carpet through the Grand Kremlin Palace. About halfway down the path, guests standing on both sides of the carpet began reaching out to shake hands with Putin, who paused awkwardly to greet as many as 100 people. He then exited with Medvedev to greet the elite Presidential Regiment military unit assembled in Cathedral Square within the Kremlin walls.

Later Monday, Putin signed his first order as president, issuing one-time payments to World War II veterans ranging from 1,000 to 5,000 rubles (\$33 to \$167) each, ahead of Wednesday's Victory Day celebrations that will mark the 67th anniversary of the end of the war. On Monday he also ordered the as-yet-unformed government to draw up a plan for social and economic

development of the country to 2030 by Dec. 1.

Before, during and after Putin's inauguration ceremony, demonstrators in support of and opposed to his rule congregated on Nikitsky Bulvar and Tverskoi Bulvar just blocks from the Kremlin.

Opposition protesters had planned to demonstrate on Manezh Square adjacent to the Kremlin, but police blocked off access to the area. Instead, demonstrators gathered in part outside the restaurant Jean-Jacques on Nikitsky Bulvar, where they were met by riot police, who cleared the area of demonstrators and made arrests.

Demonstrators, from both opposition groups and pro-Kremlin youth organizations, were detained after moving north to Tverskoi Bulvar. A total of around 120 people were arrested and taken to police stations, Interfax reported. At least 10 more demonstrators were arrested at Chistoprudny Bulvar.

A few hundred protesters on Monday evening staged a sit-in at Staraya Ploshchad, near the presidential administration offices and a few blocks east of the Kremlin, following the arrests at Chistoprudny Bulvar. Dozens of demonstrators at Staray Ploshchad were detained by police, Interfax reported.

The demonstrations followed Sunday's mass opposition event in the vicinity of Bolotnaya Ploshchad that drew tens of thousands of people and ended in violence between riot police and demonstrators. At least 70 people were injured at the event, including more than 20 cops, Interfax reported.

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