

Contact: Mark Schoeff Jr. 202-775-3242 (mschoeff@csis.org);
Gina Maffei 202-775-3167 (gmaffei@csis.org)
www.csis.org

RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS In Second Term, Putin Must Reform Market, Military, Health Care

WASHINGTON, March 12, 2004—CSIS analysts made the following statements today regarding the Russian presidential elections this Sunday, March 14:

Celeste Wallander, director, CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program (202-775-3233, cwalland@csis.org):

“President Putin has now, even before the presidential election, created a slimmer government staffed by ministers with little independent profile, thereby likely to implement his policies and priorities. After March 14, we will be able to see whether President Putin's oft-stated commitment to liberal economic market reforms and Western integration are meaningful statements and guides to Russian policy. If instead Russia continues to extend state control over business, resist transparency and rule of law, which are necessary components of a market economy, the American government -- and American investors -- will draw conclusions that Russia in Putin's second term will be at best a limited partner.”

Sarah Mendelson, senior fellow, CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program (202-775-3143, smendels@csis.org): “What a shame that thirteen years into the post-Soviet era, the presidential election is widely viewed as such a farce, reliant on administrative means, state control of the media and lack of competition. For President Putin to have replaced the government days before March 14 suggests that the presidential administration has quit even pretending that what is taking place is in fact an election. With so many pressing issues facing the Russian population, including health crises and horrendous conditions in the army, that Russians care about and want addressed, one can only hope that some day they will have a leader that confronts these and other issues. It looks doubtful that day has arrived.”

Robert McMullin, visiting fellow, CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program (202-775-3289, rmcmulli@csis.org): “The reelection of Russian President Vladimir Putin, scheduled for this Sunday, will bring little joy to the country's beleaguered armed forces, although most of them will vote for him. Military reform is one of Putin's stated priorities, but his reelection will not likely change anything for Russia's miserable military. Myopic optimists might point to the implementation of a few band-aid measures, but as the recent failed strategic missile launches graphically portrayed, Russia's military is a mere shadow of its former self with no better prospects on the horizon. The military will unenthusiastically support Putin for the same reason 80 percent of the rest of the country allegedly supports him – lack of any viable alternative. Regardless of his shortcomings, Putin is still seen as a strong, sober, decisive leader who at least pays lip service to military reform. The welfare of the Russian soldier has never been a priority for its leaders. Vladimir Putin is merely carrying on that tradition.”

*These are the views of the individuals cited, not of CSIS, which does not take policy positions.
CSIS is an independent, nonpartisan public policy organization.*