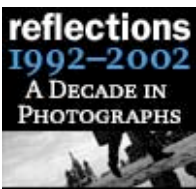


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Putin Throws Support Behind Kyoto

Combined Reports

President Vladimir Putin unambiguously backed the Kyoto Protocol on Tuesday, in his first public comments since his government sent it to the Kremlin-dominated State Duma for ratification.

Russian ratification is vital to the environmental pact. After Washington pulled out in 2001, Moscow's participation is essential to meet targets.

Visiting Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin congratulated Putin on the Russian government's recent decision to back the treaty, Itar-Tass said.

"I hope that Canada's position and its prime minister's support for Russia's decision to back the protocol will have a positive effect on the upcoming debate in the Russian parliament," Putin said.

Putin does not formally control the Duma, but the lower house of parliament is packed with his loyalists and is expected to decide on ratification by year's end.

The Cabinet endorsed the Kyoto Protocol late last month despite fierce opposition from Putin's top economic adviser, Andrei Illarionov, who said it would be bad for business.

(AP, MT)

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