

Putin against keeping high duties on agricultural equipment imports

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(Adds details of Putin's order to probe cases of "hidden" imports of agricultural equipment)

MOSCOW, Jul 6 (Prime-Tass) -- Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was speaking at a meeting with executives from agricultural equipment producer Rostselmash on Monday. He said that he was against keeping high duties permanently on imports of agricultural equipment as a means of supporting domestic producers.

In December, the Russian government introduced for nine months an import duty of 15% of the equipment's customs value, but no less than 120 euros per 1 kilowatt of engine capacity, to support domestic producers. Putin said Monday such measures were necessary during the crisis, but wouldn't be permanent. *(As per Kommersant, it was his response to Konstantin Babkin, one of RSM co-owners, who asked Putin at the meeting to introduce the current temporary 15% import duties on a permanent basis, or at least extend them 'until the crisis is over')*

Speaking about the government's support measures for producers of agricultural equipment, Putin said that the government was ready to make changes if needed. In December, the government approved a number of measures, including allocating 25 billion rubles (US\$ 800 mln) to agricultural equipment leasing company Rosagroleasing, Putin said. As of now, 21 billion rubles (US\$ 672 mln) has already been spent on the purchase of agricultural equipment, he added.

Putin said that the results of the government measures to support the industry were expected to be discussed later on Monday.

Putin also tasked the relevant ministries and agencies with probing cases of "hidden" imports of agricultural equipment into Russia, specifically, imports of Belarusian equipment through Russian company Bryanskselmash. Putin made the instructions following complaints from Rostselmash CEO Valery Maltsev, who claimed that about 1,000 Belarus-made combines were exported to Russia via Bryanskselmash and were then itemized as Russian products.

In addition, Putin said he would announce additional measures to support the car industry at a meeting of the government's presidium later on Monday.