

Putin Names Himself, Gref, Others to New Agency Board

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has appointed himself and Sberbank chief German Gref to the board of the Agency for Strategic Initiatives, a project to curry favor with businesses.

The prime minister, who will chair the board, ordered the organization to officially register itself by Aug. 25.

The other banker on the 11-member oversight body is Vladimir Dmitriyev, chief of state-owned development bank VEB, according to a government decree released late last week.

The agency, set up to help midsized companies expand their business, will also include the governors of the Sverdlovsk region and Tatarstan republic — Alexander Misharin and Rustam Minnikhanov, respectively — and Economic Development Minister Elvira Nabiullina.

The governors qualified for the seats because their regions had "good experience in supporting entrepreneurship and modernizing social services," Putin said at a Presidium session Thursday.

The board will meet at least once every three months and will endorse projects for the agency to pursue. Its other members include Sergei Vorobyov, chief of recruitment company Ward Howell International; Alexander Galushka, president of Delovaya Rossia, a lobby group for midsized businesses; and editor-in-chief of Expert magazine Valery Fadeyev.

In addition to supporting growth of companies and their export plans, the agency will seek to establish certification systems for the work force, upgrade professional standards and back social organizations.

At the Presidium, Putin asked all government agencies and regional governors to help the new agency, which will function as a nonprofit organization.

The Agency for Strategic Initiatives' chief, Andrei Nikitin, said Thursday that the group was still looking for an office, and considering one of the City Hall office buildings on Novy Arbat as an option, RIA-Novosti reported.

Nikitin, 31, comes to the agency from the position of chief executive at a company that produces composite and fiberglass materials for domestic energy companies, such as Gazprom, Rosneft and LUKoil.

The company, called Management Company Ruskompozit, is a member of the Delovaya Rossia political party and has manufacturing facilities in Tver and Ufa. Its latest efforts to remain the industry leader included an agreement signed in April with Holland's Polyworx to develop a technology for using composite components for building pedestrian and motorway overpasses.

Ruskompozit agreed in March to support the pro-government youth camp at Lake Seliger.

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