

RusAl Web Site Courts Minorities in Norilsk

By [Irina Filatova](#)

September 08, 2010

The  **Moscow Times**

United Company RusAl unveiled a web portal Wednesday detailing its complaints against Norilsk Nickel's management and Vladimir Potanin's Interros Holding, a rival shareholder in the miner, in what analysts said was a long-shot bid to win support from minority owners.

The unusual move comes as both sides are courting small-time Norilsk owners ahead of an extraordinary shareholders meeting expected in October. The web site, Save Norilsk Nickel, repeats a number of RusAl's allegations about ineffective management at the world's largest nickel producer.

In particular, the site accuses Norilsk managers, including CEO Vladimir Strzhalkovsky, of lacking adequate experience in the mining industry.

"We hope that by presenting the facts and figures that illustrate the inefficient use of resources by Norilsk Nickel's management and its inability to ensure the dynamic

development of the company ... we will be able to convince the shareholders to vote for the election of a new board of directors," RusAl CEO Oleg Deripaska said in a statement.

Deripaska and Potanin, whose companies each control 25 percent stakes in Norilsk, have been battling intermittently since RusAl became a shareholder in 2008. RusAl lost its parity with Interros after a contested board election earlier this year.

A Norilsk spokeswoman said the company did not "see concrete proposals or even constructive criticism on this web site."

Interros brushed off the latest criticism, saying it would not respond in kind.

"Deripaska could have drawn other conclusions on how to use his energy after the meeting with the prime minister in Norilsk," an Interros spokesman said.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has regularly said the shareholders must settle their dispute amicably to avoid harming Norilsk.

During a visit to the Arctic city late last month, Putin suggested that RusAl should stop seeking excessive dividends. He also ordered both owners to re-invest more of Norilsk's profit in the business and the heavily polluted city of Norilsk.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said he was aware of the web site but that "it wasn't of any interest" to the government.

"We have no right to intervene in the shareholders' relations. But in any event, actions like this by shareholders must not damage the company's operations or negatively affect the implementation of what was decided at the meeting in Norilsk two weeks ago," he told The Moscow Times.

At the meeting, Putin praised RusAl and Interros for moving to settle their feud but did not offer any guidance on how they should proceed.

"Norilsk Nickel is demonstrating strong financial results, which are likely to be more convincing for the shareholders than the information on the web site," said Andrei Tretelnikov, an analyst at Rye, Man & Gor Securities. "There wouldn't be those results without effective management."

He also dismissed RusAl's claim that industry experience was necessary for all of Norilsk's management.

"More important is a clear understanding of industry trends, the economics of the company and the ability to foresee and promptly react to changes in the business environment," he said.

Nikolai Sosnovsky, an analyst at UralSib, said the online campaign might be more of a public relations move to grab attention.

"RusAl just outlined its complaints, which are already very well-known. Maybe something will become more obvious for minority shareholders. But a super effect is unlikely," he said.

[The web site](#) had about 2,000 visitors in its first hour, a spokeswoman said. RusAl also got a number of e-mails and calls from Norilsk employees, she said, adding that the site was not meant to criticize Norilsk Nickel.

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