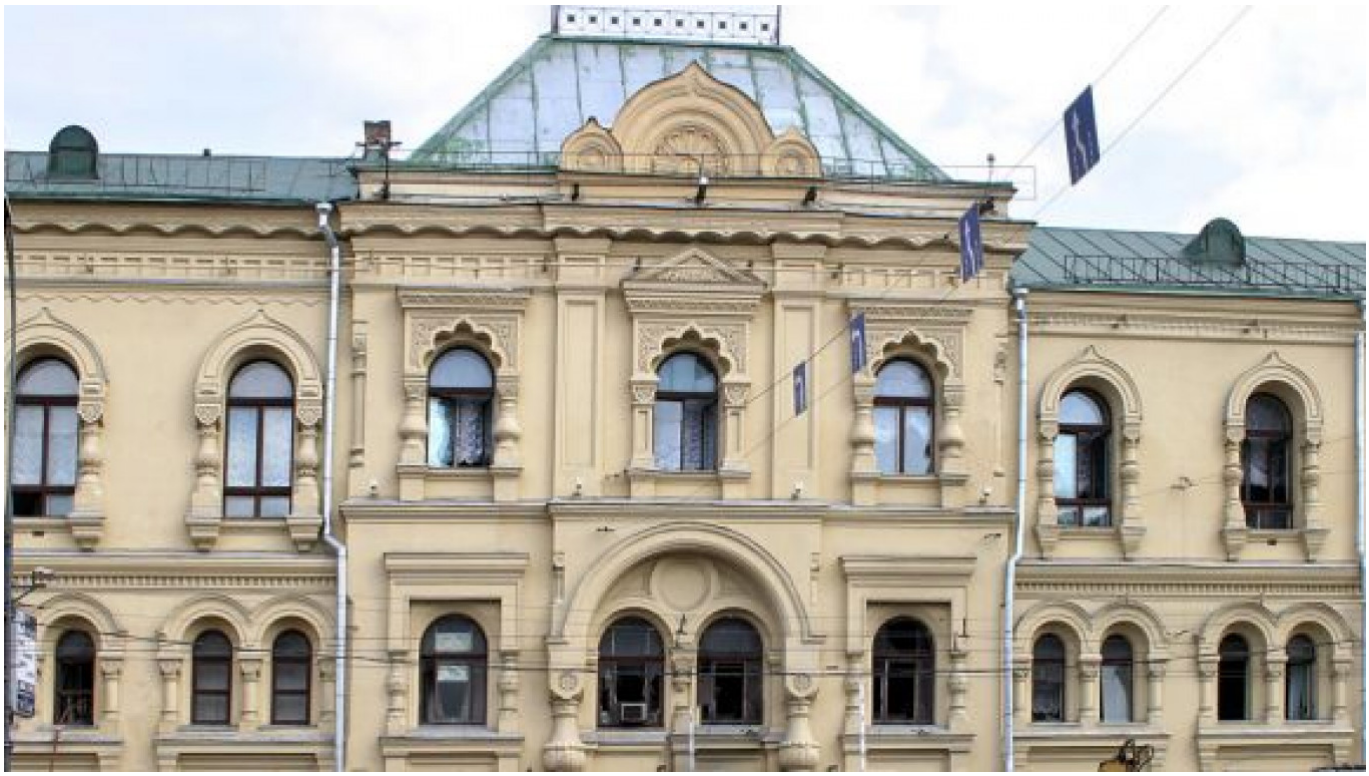
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

U.K.-Irish Firm to Revamp Museum

By Derek Andersen

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The Polytechnical Museum will eventually move from this pre-revolutionary building to a new site outside Moscow.

Moscow's decrepit Polytechnical Museum is about to begin its transformation into a modern, interactive science center after the British-Irish firm Event Communications won a competition Thursday to produce a concept study for the change.

"We want to create a hub of innovation at the highest level of research, as well as a dynamic visitor experience, as is necessary for any top-10 science museum," stated Esther Dugdale, creative director of Event Communications, a firm specializing in museum design.

The museum is housed in a massive pre-revolutionary building in the central Kitai-Gorod neighborhood. Its refurbishment will cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

Event Communications was selected from a shortlist of four firms by a 16-member jury that included Culture Minister Alexander Avdeyev, Rusnano head Anatoly Chubais, presidential aide Arkady Dvorkovich and representatives of several European museums. The other three

contenders were the Spanish CosmoCaixa, the U.S. Ralph Appelbaum Associates and U.S.-Canadian Lord Cultural Resources.

Dugdale said the design firm was given a specific outline of tasks that included defining the functions of the "new museum," creating an approach to its exhibits and identifying the facilities necessary for a museum of its future status.

An important step in the concept design will be identifying the functions of another museum building to be built outside Moscow. The site of the building will be chosen based on that vision, Dugdale said.

The project will take six years and at least $250 million — already allocated by the government — to complete. Dugdale didn't say how much the concept study, due next February, will cost. Gazeta.ru reported last week that the price tag would amount to 300,000 euros (about $410,000).

Museum director Boris Saltykov told reporters Thursday that the total budget for the project was not yet set. In keeping with Western practice, the "new" museum will include shops and cafes to generate additional income, and state funding will be reduced to 25 percent of its budget. The museum's current staff of 600, enormous by modern standards, will be reduced to 250.

An oversight board headed by Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov will be in charge of work to upgrade the museum.

The course toward modernization began last year, when state corporation Rusnano formed the Foundation for the Development of the Polytechnical Museum. The foundation and the museum's management did not coexist peacefully, and there were suspicions that Rusnano wanted to move the museum outside Moscow and take over its imposing premises.

Gurgen Grigoryan, director of the museum since 1986, was dismissed by the Culture Ministry on June 7 of this year and replaced by Saltykov, a former science and technical policy minister.

"When the foundation began to operate, it became clear in practice that our views do not coincide," Grigoryan said in an interview with Kultura television at the time.

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