

# Foreign Executives to Sit Down With Putin

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The heads of major international companies will meet with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Oct. 18 at a session of the Foreign Investment Advisory Council, the government announced Monday.

The agenda for this year's council meeting has yet to be finalized, according to the prime minister's press office.

The council has a rotating membership made up of the leaders of 42 major foreign companies and banks that are active in Russia. It is chaired by the prime minister and its executive committee is headed by Economic Development Minister Elvira Nabiullina.

"We consider the FIAC an effective and serious platform to address not only current but also strategic objectives of industry development," Unilever Russia press officer Yekaterina Zadonskaya said.

Unilever has been a member of the council since 2000. It heads the council's expert group on administrative barriers. Zadonskaya said members of that group met with Igor Shuvalov, first deputy prime minister and chairman of the state Customs Union Commission, in the middle of September.

The result of that meeting was a proposal that council members be able to offer expert opinions on the effect of new Russian customs regulations on business. That proposal will be developed by the Economic Development Ministry and submitted to the Customs Union Commission for approval sometime this month.

"This is especially pressing as the Customs Union [of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan] comes into force, and it affects the interests not only of Unilever, but of many Western investors on the Russian market," Zadonskaya said.

Procter & Gamble heads the expert group on customs regulations. Other expert groups include those for the development of the market and consumer sector, which is led by Nestle Russia, and for improving Russia's international image, which is led by Coca-Cola.

Other current members of the council include 3M, BP, Deutsche Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Ernst & Young, Ford Motor Co., Mitsubishi, Siemens and the World Bank.

The Ernst & Young company serves as coordinator for foreign investors. Foreign council members meet at the Ernst & Young office, and the company sets up the council's expert groups, according to the Ernst & Young press office. Company spokesman Pyotr Yudin was also unaware of the agenda for the upcoming council meeting.

This year's meeting will be the 24th since the council's foundation in 1994. The council's last meeting was in November of last year.

The council regularly commissions and publishes research on the investment climate in the country. Direct investors, portfolio investors and bankers are surveyed for that research.

The council has been instrumental in the lowering or cancellation of customs duties on agricultural products and equipment and in improving legislation on copyrights.

The prime minister signed the order setting the date for the meeting on September 24. Shuvalov issued orders the following week to several ministries and state agencies to prepare for the meeting, according to a press release.

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