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Liberal Economist Joins Volodin

By Maxim Tovkaylo

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Anna Popova

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has appointed Anna Popova, a deputy economic development minister described by colleagues as a staunch liberal, as the first deputy for his new chief of staff, Vyacheslav Volodin.

Putin signed the order Monday and it was published the following day on the government web site.

Popova will replace Anastasia Rakova, who joined Putin's former chief of staff, Sergei Sobyanin, in the Moscow city government as a deputy mayor and Sobyanin's chief of staff.

Like her predecessor, Popova will oversee administrative reforms and will be responsible for the lawmaking in the government administration, several sources told Vedomosti. Her responsibilities were confirmed by Putin's press secretary, Dmitry Peskov.

Volodin has not yet decided how his six deputies, including five who served under Sobyanin,

will divide their duties. Popova may take over some responsibilities from Sergei Gaplikov, who oversees the government's economic bloc, a White House source said.

Peskov said there was no immediate rush for Volodin to determine his deputies' responsibilities.

Popova was born in Leningrad and graduated from the Leningrad Finance and Economics Institute with a degree in industrial planning. She has worked in the Economic Development Ministry since 2004 and became a deputy minister in July 2007.

At the ministry she was also responsible for administrative reforms and drafting legislation, meaning that she is accustomed to the duties her new post will entail, a government official said.

Popova oversaw the development of legislation that significantly limited the number of inspections faced by small business, an Economic Development Ministry official said, calling her "the motor behind that idea."

Additionally, she was responsible for developing Russia's financial market and improving corporate governance. Popova had a hand in drafting reforms that simplified bankruptcy procedures for companies and individuals.

"There was a breakthrough in corporate legislation under Popova," said Dmitry Stepanov, a partner at Egorov, Puginsky, Afanasiev & Partners.

Popova has liberal views and is willing to compromise, but she will also stand by her position to the last, an Economic Development Ministry source said, adding that she was a good choice to conduct administrative reforms. "Popova is someone who's respectable and incorruptible," he said.

An official who knows Popova from their work on the government's commission for administrative reform said she was a complete liberal.

After the Raspadskaya coal mine explosions that killed 90 people earlier this year, a law was passed allowing oversight bodies to halt the work of a company without a court order starting next year, but Popova was able to make sure that the harsh measure was only applied to hazardous industrial sites, the source said.

It is possible that Popova will now chair the commission on administrative reform instead of Sobyanin, he added.

Several former colleagues described Popova as reserved. She's not quick to show emotion, and it is often difficult to tell whether she likes something, an Economic Development Ministry official said.

One of her former bosses described her as more reserved than outgoing. "If she's given responsibility for some of the economic matters, she'll be able to handle it in terms of the logic, but in terms of her ability to push things through — she'll have a tough time," he said.

Business should expect only improvements from Popova's appointment, said Sergei Borisov,

president of the business lobby Opora. Popova consistently fought to reduce pressure on business, he said.

"Without the approval of the government administration you can't get anything done, so Popova will have an easier time now," said Vladimir Yuzhakov, head of the administrative reform department at the Center for Strategic Research.

Popova did not study as a lawyer, but that hasn't prevented her from successfully developing legislation, Stepanov said. "Many lawyers would be blessed to understand legal questions like she does," he said.

Economic Development Ministry officials said no decision had been made on Popova's replacement. Popova will definitely remain as a state representative on the board of VTB, one of the ministry sources said.

The government administration includes one other former deputy economic development minister, Andrei Belousov. Until this spring, a second former deputy minister, Kirill Androsov, also worked there, said ministry spokeswoman Svetlana Glikman. She said it was a sign of the ministry's highly qualified staff.

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