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Zubkov to Keep Gazprom Post Despite Medvedev's Order

By Anatoly Medetsky

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Zubkov will not leave his chairmanship by Oct. 1, a Kremlin aide said. **Denis Grishkin**

First Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov will remain chairman of the country's biggest company, Gazprom, a Kremlin aide said Monday, in the midst of confusion about the position that sprouted from the Kremlin push to purge state companies of top government officials.

President Dmitry Medvedev has ordered Cabinet ministers and top dogs in his administration to forfeit their ranks as board members at state-controlled companies in two phases, to be complete by the end of next month. Zubkov appears to be an exception to the campaign that sought to level the playing field in the state-dominated economy.

"There will be no exit by Oct. 1" for Zubkov, said Arkady Dvorkovich, an economic aide to Medvedev. The final decision will respect the "interests of the company."

The reasons for the government to continue to mull the resolution of the Zubkov case appear

to range from his thoughts about leaving the government to handing over access to strictly confidential material at the world's biggest natural gas company, according to Dvorkovich.

Under Medvedev's April order, independent directors were to replace government officials on the boards. Dvorkovich said officials balked at giving access to top secrets to independents, apparently referring to some exploration data that the government classifies.

In addition, "given the current political cycle, plans by certain people to leave the government have already transpired," Dvorkovich said, Interfax reported. "There's no need to rush."

The Cabinet will have to resign when Russia elects a new president in March. Zubkov has not made any public statements about his immediate or future career plans. He has, however, in recent months left all other company board seats he occupied.

Zubkov’s role at Gazprom has come into focus as time runs out for the company to schedule a special shareholders meeting to replace him on the board. Corporate rules prescribe a month’s notice for a meeting like this, meaning Gazprom would have to announce its decision by Wednesday.

That said, Medvedev's order was not explicit about Zubkov's removal from Gazprom in the first place. The order identified 17 state-controlled companies that should purge their boards of government officials by July 1. The specific mention of Gazprom said Energy Minister Sergei Shmatko was to leave, but it did not mention anyone else. Shmatko gave up his seat in June.

According to the order, the Oct. 1 deadline is for the remaining state-controlled companies, save the 17 firms that were listed by name, to reshuffle their boards.

Dvorkovich, however, on Monday did not dispute the idea that Zubkov was supposed to leave Gazprom.

The officials, whom Medvedev identified at the 17 companies, had to quit the boards because they supervised the industries in which the companies were dominant. Zubkov, on the contrary, oversees agriculture in the Cabinet.

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