

Medvedev Names Ex-KGB Officer as St. Petersburg Governor

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President Dmitry Medvedev named former KGB officer Georgy Poltavchenko as governor of St. Petersburg on Tuesday.

“This is a major responsibility that you should carry out with honor,” Medvedev told Poltavchenko at his residence in Sochi.

The new governor’s candidacy must be approved by the St. Petersburg parliament, which is dominated by the ruling United Russia party.

Poltavchenko, 58, replaces Valentina Matviyenko, the outgoing governor, who will lead the Federation Council. A St. Petersburg native and presidential envoy for the Central Federal District that includes Moscow, Poltavchenko worked for the KGB and Federal Security Service between 1979 and 1992. He was appointed acting governor on Aug. 22.

Matviyenko’s departure follows the ouster of Mayor Yury Luzhkov last September and comes as Russia prepares for State Duma elections in December and a 2012 presidential contest in

which Prime Minister Vladimir Putin may seek to return to the Kremlin.

“Poltavchenko is a compromise figure and is really already the governor,” Mikhail Vinogradov, head of the St. Petersburg Politics Foundation, said last week in a telephone interview. “On the one hand, he’s Putin confidante, but he’s also worked with Medvedev.”

St. Petersburg is Europe’s fourth most populous city after London, Moscow and Paris with a population of about 4.6 million people, and is also the hometown of Putin and Medvedev.

Medvedev, who Putin chose to replace him as president in 2008 after completing the maximum two consecutive terms allowed by the Constitution, in June backed Matviyenko to lead the Federation Council and become the nation’s third-highest-ranking official.

Matviyenko, who had governed St. Petersburg since 2003, won more than 93 percent of the vote in two municipal districts last week, becoming eligible for the job in the Federation Council.

Boris Nemtsov, an opposition leader and deputy prime minister under late President Boris Yeltsin, wrote on his blog that independent candidates were barred from running against Matviyenko, calling her election “a practice run of the fraud” planned during the parliamentary and presidential polls.

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