

# Putin Keeps Eyes on Finance in Sochi

By [Anatoly Medetsky](#)

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Putin watching the South Stream agreement being signed Friday. Later he christened a ship and ignored a spy. **Ivan Sekretarev**

SOCHI — Prime Minister Vladimir Putin chose to focus strictly on business at the International Investment Forum on Friday, appearing to look past ravishing former spy Anna Chapman who was staffing a regional exhibit.

As Putin began his forum itinerary, he toured an exhibition where companies and provinces showed off their investment plans, stopping by the stall of Chapman's native Volgograd region. Wearing a metallic-threaded knit dress and high heels, the deep-cover agent who returned to Russia in a spy swap last year — to become a national celebrity — stood aside and went unnoticed by the forum's top visitor as another young woman briefed him on the region's projects. Putin eventually walked away with a knit cap and scarf as gifts.

After all, the government intended the forum, which gathered captains of the Russian economy and global investment luminaries, to be an event to promote business opportunities rather than recall the seamy side of international relations.

Putin's speech at the plenary session later highlighted the government's efforts to preserve financial stability and boost economic growth, while he also made sure to note the headline-making debt problems of the United States and European Union.

"I must remark that Russia feels confident today in terms of key indicators," the prime minister said.

The government plans on economic growth of at least 4 percent over each of the next three years, he said. Sovereign foreign debt measures a mere 3 percent of gross domestic product, he added, comparing that number with the average of 90 percent for developed economies.

Putin also stressed Russia's vast gold and foreign currency reserves, the third largest in the world, as well as the declining inflation rate that could wind down to a post-Soviet record of 7 percent this year.

Flanked at the podium by such investors as Leon Black, chief of Apollo Global Management, and Drew Guff, managing director of Siguler Guff, Putin stayed on to moderate some of the plenary session before heading off.

His next stop again brought to mind thoughts about espionage, which seemed to be haunting the day. Boarding a new exploration ship, Putin ceremonially christened it the Vyacheslav Tikhonov, in honor of a Soviet actor most popular for playing the role of a legendary spy in Nazi Germany.

Built by Dubai-based Drydocks World and bought by state-owned shipping company Sovcomflot, the vessel will carry out seismic exploration for Rosneft and ExxonMobil at their joint Tuapse Trough project in the Black Sea from September to March. Sovcomflot outbid Norway's PGS and France's CGG Veritas to win the contract, according to a handout from the Cabinet press service.

On the ship, Putin attended a ceremony to sign several contracts, including an agreement between Sovcomflot and another state-run firm, United Shipbuilding Corporation, to develop a plan to produce exploration ships in Russia.

Earlier at the forum, Putin looked on at another signing ceremony for multiple contracts between Russian and foreign companies in the areas of energy, tourism, sea ports, health care and carmaking.

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