The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Skolkovo Adviser Sees Post-Medvedev Future

By Rachel Nielsen

April 12, 2012



Observers have worried about President-elect Putin's support for Skolkovo, co-chaired by billionaire Viktor Vekselberg, above. **Sergei Porter**

SKOLKOVO, Moscow Region ⊠ The coming change in presidents won't halt the development of the Skolkovo innovation hub, a top consultant to Skolkovo's president said Thursday, as hundreds of technology entrepreneurs, investors and students descended on a conference promoting the hub.

Pekka Viljakainen, an adviser on startup matters to Skolkovo Foundation president and board co-chairman Viktor Vekselberg, said that while some of the public has expressed doubts about whether President-elect Vladimir Putin will continue the Skolkovo project, started by President Dmitry Medvedev, "I don't see any kind of stopping or slowing down."

Speaking to The Moscow Times on the sidelines of Thursday's conference, Viljakainen added, "Who in this world would stop something that is creating jobs?"

Observers have questioned Putin's support for the costly technology incubator and research center, which Medvedev's administration has sought to establish in Skolkovo, the Moscow region town just west of the capital. Putin has said he believes in slow modernization, while Medvedev has said he holds the opposite view. The president is widely expected to become prime minister in Putin's next administration.

The creation of the Skolkovo project — both the construction of the technopark buildings and the development of the incubator program are happening from scratch — is expected to cost 120 billion rubles ($4 billion), with half of that amount coming from the government and half from investors brought into the program, Skolkovo spokeswoman Darya Manayenkova said. The public phase of Skolkovo's development started in December 2009 when Medvedev first announced the concept.

Construction of the physical site for Skolkovo, called the Skolkovo Technopark, is under way. On Thursday, head of the Office for Presidential Affairs, Vladimir Kozhin, announced that Skolkovo will host the G8 summit of world leaders in 2014, RIA-Novosti reported. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said earlier this week at a federal government meeting that construction "needs to be sped up" because of its role in the G8.

"I think that the construction will accelerate," Viljakainen, a native of Finland, said in the interview. "I'm sure that the Russian president doesn't want to show something that is halfway made," he added in a reference to the construction of the Skolkovo Technopark. (Viljakainen is an individual investor in Sanoma, the Finnish parent company of The Moscow Times.)

The technopark's administrative building, called The Cube, is scheduled to be completed in May, Vekselberg said late last year, according to the Skolkovo website. It is partly built now, Skolkovo spokeswoman Yevgenia Tereshkina said Thursday. Currently, those startups that have won incubator status with Skolkovo, known as "resident companies," can use space in a building at the Skolkovo School of Management, the business school where Thursday's conference took place and a neighbor of the future technopark.

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https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/04/12/skolkovo-adviser-sees-post-medvedev-future-a14041