

# Mayor Shows Expats He's No Luzhkov

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Gaining entry into Moscow's Petrovsky Palace where Mayor Sergei Sobyenin spoke to foreign investors this week was akin to penetrating a fortress. Guests were warned in advance about the security rules for the invitation-only event organized by the Mayor's Office for members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Russia:

- Bring your passport.☒
- If you plan to arrive by car, notify organizers in advance about the license plate number — and the color — of the vehicle.
- Russians: Don't forget to tell organizers your patronymic or you won't get past security.☒
- Reporters: Show up at least 75 minutes early to make sure you clear security before the speech starts.☒

Police cars and officers surrounded the palace, and dark-suited security officials walked around inside. Reporters had to use a separate entrance with a metal detector and X-ray machine.☒

"The security is tougher here than it was for Vice President Joe Biden," said a person familiar with preparations for Tuesday's event and Biden's meeting with the same group of businesspeople last year.

But guests had no complaints. They showed up to gauge Sobyenin's openness to foreign investment, and they liked what they saw. Guests praised Sobyenin in private conversations after the speech and, pressed to elaborate, inevitably said, "He's not Luzhkov."

In other major capitals, it might be an insult to be praised for not being the previous mayor — especially after 18 months on the job. But Sobyenin has faced a mammoth task coming to grips with the city after Yury Luzhkov's 18-year reign. Luzhkov never met with foreign investors in a format like Tuesday's event — and that change alone is optimistic.

But there are other positive signs that Moscow is indeed open for business. In his speech, Sobyenin reiterated that City Hall is eager to welcome foreign investment and that foreigners are needed to turn Moscow into an international financial center.

More important, Sobyenin is putting action behind his words. In February, a new City Hall council met for the first time to explore ways to support business; among its members is AmCham Russia president Andrew Somers. On Tuesday, Sobyenin proposed creating a working group where AmCham would advise city officials on economic measures.

Sobyenin also is taking time to listen. He stayed after his speech to meet informally with foreigners at a two-hour reception. Those two hours are what made the event a success. Businesspeople need the mayor's ear and the opportunity to participate in the economic development of the city. Sobyenin, in turn, needs the wisdom — and the money — of businesspeople. The unique access offered to the mayor was an important step in this direction. Sobyenin's tight security might make him seem inapproachable, but he has given a clear signal that he is open to change.

*The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.*

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