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Kudrin Bemoans Budget, Putin Decree

By The Moscow Times

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Former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin on Tuesday criticized the decree by President Vladimir Putin that orders Gazprom and the country's other strategic companies to seek government approval for their activity abroad.

Signed earlier this month, the decree "worsens the investment climate" in the country and runs counter to Russian legislation, Kudrin said at an investment forum.

Putin issued the decree after the European Commission announced it would investigate Gazprom on suspicion that the company hinders the free flow of gas across European Union member countries, prevents diversification of supplies and dictates unfair prices.

Kudrin quit the Cabinet last year over a fiscal policy dispute with then-President Dmitry Medvedev and has since refashioned himself as an independent financial analyst and critic of some government policies.

Kudrin also lamented the Cabinet's spending priorities for next year during the forum.

He said that 80 percent of the spending increase next year will go toward defense and law enforcement.

"We didn't go for an increase in spending that will help growth in the future," he said, adding that he was referring to expenditures to improve education and foster public oversight of government activities.

He said the 5 percent spending increase in the 2013 budget amounts to zero in real terms because inflation is projected to increase at about the same rate.

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