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Career Diplomat Replaces Rogozin as NATO Envoy

By The Moscow Times

October 23, 2012

President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday appointed Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko as Russia's new envoy to NATO.

The Kremlin announced Grushko's appointment to Brussels and the decision to release him from his post at the Foreign Ministry in a two-sentence statement on its website.

The appointment of Grushko, the first career diplomat to hold the post, was not unexpected after Kommersant, citing unidentified sources, reported in April that he had been tapped to replace the sharp-tongued Dmitry Rogozin, who moved back to Moscow in December to become a deputy prime minister.

A senior State Duma deputy praised Grushko, 57, but said he faced a challenge dealing with U.S.-led plans for NATO to install a missile defense system in Europe.

"Clearly, the problem of the deployment of U.S. missile defense in Eastern Europe will be the central focus of NATO and Russia, even though the main decision on this issue will not be made in Brussels as much as in Washington," said Vyacheslav Nikonov, first deputy head of the Duma's International Affairs Committee and lawmaker with United Russia.

"This is more about relations between Russia and the United States than Russia and NATO," he said, according to Interfax.

The Kremlin adamantly opposes the missile defense project, which is meant to defend Europe from a possible Iranian nuclear attack, as a possible threat.

Nikonov described Grushko as "an extremely experienced professional who is highly respected in the expert, diplomatic and political community."

Grushko has worked in the Foreign Ministry since 1977 and has served as deputy foreign minister since 2005. He headed Russia's delegation on military security and arms control in Vienna from 1996 to 2000.

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