The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Auditors Pore Over Gazprom Books

By Anatoly Medetsky

May 12, 2013



The Audit Chamber is probing Gazprom at a time when it is dealing with suspicions of improper pipe purchases. **Maxim Stulov**

The government's fiscal watchdog has started looking at Gazprom's books in an audit that is poised to produce exciting results, the agency's chief said.

"I think the findings will be interesting," Sergei Stepashin, chairman of the Audit Chamber, said Friday, Interfax reported.

His remarks are the latest update on the sweeping audit after he announced in January that it was on the schedule for this year. Stepashin did not say why he expected the audit to dig up something of interest.

The auditors are swooping down on the world's biggest natural-gas company, run by Alexei Miller, at a time when it is dealing with suspicions of improper purchases of pipes.

The Audit Chamber last examined Gazprom's accounting records in 2008.

"It's the first time in the past five years that we are conducting a serious inspection of Gazprom," Stepashin said.

He added that the gas company was cooperating with the auditors.

In January, Stepashin named pipe contracts as one of the things that would come under scrutiny.

Last month, the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service started an investigation of its own into Gazprom's deals with one of its main pipe suppliers. It suspects that the gas giant and North European Pipe Project, a firm controlled by President Vladimir Putin's former judo partners brothers Arkady and Boris Rotenberg, restricted competition on the market. Both companies denied any wrongdoing.

Gazprom showed up on the radar of the two watchdogs following Putin's comments — made in response to a question at an investment conference last fall — that the authorities should look into any suspected violations at the company.

Miller has been at the helm of Gazprom since 2001, and his contract awards him the chief executive's seat until June 2016.

In the Audit Chamber inspection, veteran auditor Sergei Ryabukhin, who has held his position since 2001, is in charge of the effort, which will take place until November.

Ryabukhin also led other major audits, including that of Moscow City transportation expenses following the ouster of Mayor Yury Luzhkov in 2010.

Another major energy company, Rosneft, is in line for an audit next year.

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