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Sanctions, Apple, Polyus Gold: Business in Brief

By The Moscow Times

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Putin Says No Sanctions for Visa and MasterCard

Russia has no plans to impose sanctions on Visa and MasterCard, but they may lose their position in the country's market, of which they account for 90 percent, President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday, Interfax reported.

He said that the two international payment systems were under strong political pressure and called the suspension of payment services to Russian clients "a very big mistake."

In March, after the U.S. imposed sanctions on Russia over its annexation of Crimea, Visa and MasterCard suspended payment services to Bank Rossiya and two other banks whose shareholders appeared on the sanctions list.

"We do not plan any punitive steps against unreliable partners, but they are undermining

confidence in them," Putin said, adding that other Russia's economic partners should keep this in mind. *(MT)*

Minister Warns Foreign Companies

Russia's natural resources minister said Thursday that the door would be closed to foreign companies working in Russia if they decide to leave the country over Ukraine-related sanctions.

He also said that so far foreign companies had not signaled their desire to leave Russia, the world's top crude oil producer, over sanctions the West imposed after Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula.

"It is obvious that they will not return in the near future if they sever investment agreements with us, I mean there are consequences as well," Sergei Donskoi told reporters.

"Russia is one of the most promising countries in terms of hydrocarbons production. If some contracts are severed here, then, colleagues, you loose a serious lump of your future pie," the minister added. *(Reuters)*

Russia Explores WTO Sanctions Challenge

Russia has told the U.S. that its Ukraine-related sanctions on a Russian bank and Russian citizens are illegal under World Trade Organization rules and must be scrapped.

Russian Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev said last week that Russia could launch a dispute at the world trade body to challenge U.S. sanctions.

The latest warning, set out in a confidential document circulated at the WTO on Wednesday, explained what grounds Russia would have for doing so and made clear that Moscow believes it would win a trade dispute if it launched one. *(Reuters)*

Russia Eyes Polish Apple Ban

Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan may restrict imports of Polish apples due to concerns over the quality of food safety checks, a Russian official said Thursday, amid increased tensions between Moscow and the West over Ukraine.

Russia's state veterinary and phytosanitary service, or VPSS, denied any political motive for considering import restrictions, but Poland has sharply criticized Moscow's stance toward neighboring Ukraine in the past few months.

Poland is the world's biggest exporter of apples and Russia and Belarus are its top two customers.

In the marketing year 2012 to 2013, Poland exported a total of 1.2 million tons of apples worth 438 million euros ($606 million). *(Reuters)*

Polyus Gold Q1 Sales Down 15%

Russia's top gold miner Polyus Gold said on Thursday its sales fell 15 percent, year-on-year, to $447 million during the first three months of the year and reconfirmed its output guidance for 2014.

Polyus, controlled by businessman Suleiman Kerimov, said it produced 331,000 troy ounces of gold in the first quarter compared with 321,000 in the same period of the previous year.

It said it was on track to produce between 1.58 million and 1.65 million ounces this year. *(Reuters)*

Integra To Delist GDRs

Russian oil services group Integra said Thursday it had agreed to a proposal from some members of its management to acquire the company and delist its global depositary receipts.

Last month, the company said management would pay $10 per common share or $20 per GDR, valuing the company at approximately $89.7 million on a fully diluted basis. *(Reuters)*

TMK Sees Q1 Shipments Fall

TMK, Russia's largest maker of steel pipes, said first-quarter shipments fell 3 percent year-on-year to 1.02 million tonnes and forecast a marginal decrease in shipments for 2014.

TMK, controlled by businessman Dmitry Pumpyansky, also said Russian demand for tubular products would fall slightly in 2014 due to "the unstable macroeconomic environment, exchange rate volatility and uncertainty in commodity markets."

The company said its board had recommended paying a final dividend for 2013 of 0.78 rubles ($0.02) per share, which would make the total payout for the year amount to a quarter of company profit.

A final decision on the dividend payout will be made at the company's annual general meeting on June 19.

Shares in the company, which are trading around 20 percent lower than at the start of the year, were down 3 percent at 1305 GMT. *(Reuters)*

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