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Luhansk People's Republic Appoints Russian Lobbyist to Head Council of Ministers

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The head of Ukraine's self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic appointed a prominent Russian lobbyist with ties to Moscow's elite to act as chairman of its council of ministers Friday in a move likely to prompt fresh accusations that Russia is backing the separatists there.

Marat Bashirov has held a number of positions close to Russian decision-making circles, including assistant to the chairman of the Federation Council's Committee on Foreign Affairs, according to the lobbying.ru website. He has also occupied senior positions at billionaire Viktor Vekselberg's Renova conglomerate and IES Holding, one of Russia's largest private energy companies, according to the website.

Bashirov joins a number of other representatives of the Russian business community with close ties to the self-proclaimed republics of Luhansk and Donetsk. Kremlin insider Konstantin Malofeyev, the founder of Marshall Capital investment fund, has been linked

to Russian rebel leader Igor Strelkov, Donetsk People's Republic head Denis Pushilin and Alexander Borodai, prime minister of the self-proclaimed republic.

Following in the footsteps of neighboring Donetsk, rebels in Luhansk proclaimed the creation of an independent territory in late April. Run by pro-Russian separatists, in May both self-proclaimed republics held referendums on independence that the international community has not recognized.

The West has repeatedly accused Moscow of supporting pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine's east since civil conflict broke out there this spring. Russia denies the claims.

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