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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin's Salary Doubled Last Year

By Peter Spinella

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One of the highest incomes by a Russian official for last year was declared by Valentina Matviyenko, a former governor of St. Petersburg.

Russia's two most powerful officials declared twice as much income for last year as they did in 2013, according to declarations posted on their respective websites Wednesday.

President Vladimir Putin declared 7.6 million rubles ($150,000) for 2014 versus 3.6 million for the previous year, while Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev declared slightly higher — 8 million rubles — versus 4.2 million in 2013.

Last April, on the day that his income declaration was published, Putin signed a decree giving himself and the prime minister a raise of 265 percent. But the president decreased their salaries, as well as those of many other top officials, by 10 percent last month in response to Russia's economic crisis.

Presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov, whose declared income last year was 1.5 million rubles higher than the president's, told reporters on Wednesday that Putin's income increase

was directly attributable to his pay raise because he has no other source of income, state media reported.

It is illegal for Russian officials to conduct entrepreneurial activity, according to legislation on government service.

Some Putin critics have alleged that he possesses billions of dollars in hidden wealth. In February, Bill Browder, a vociferous critic of Putin whose Hermitage Capital fund was once the largest foreign investor in Russia, told news network CNN that he believes Putin is the world's richest man with about $200 billion stashed away in shares, hedge funds and Swiss bank accounts.

After 10 years of working in Russia, Browder was declared a threat to Russian national security in 2006 and denied entry into the country. He has been a vocal critic of Putin since then.

Forbes magazine has never put Putin on its annual list of billionaires because it has been unable to confirm such claims, according to a statement published in Newsweek magazine at the time of Browder's comment.

One of the highest incomes by a Russian official for last year was declared by Valentina Matviyenko, a former governor of St. Petersburg and the current speaker of Russia's upper house of parliament, the Federation Council. Matviyenko declared 160 million rubles ($3 million) but said 95 percent of that was from the sale of personal real estate.

The highest income among members of the presidential administration and Cabinet was declared by Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Khloponin at 280 million rubles ($5.5 million). Khloponin, a former head of mining giant Norilsk Nickel, said he owns 25 real estate properties including one in Italy.

The income declarations also included those of officials' spouses. The wife with the highest income was Natalya Prikhodko, who is married to Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Prikhodko. She earned 119 million rubles, about 10 times more than her husband.

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