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Putin Wants Greater Biotech Role

By The Moscow Times

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Russia wants to have a 5 percent share in the global biotech market by 2020, a senior official said Friday after a government meeting chaired by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

Russian firms currently hold only 0.2 percent share of the global biotech market, and officials fear the oil-rich country will lag behind in developing the technologies expected to be used to produce up to 80 percent of all medicines in 2030.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development forecasts that by 2030 about a half of all agricultural output will be produced with the use of biotechnologies such as genetic engineering. The market is currently estimated at $2 trillion.

"The new wave of global technological development will be linked to biotechnologies and new materials unlike the previous wave linked to information and computer technology," Deputy Economic Development Minister Andrei Klepach told reporters.

Putin told a panel of government ministers and entrepreneurs such as oil-to-telecoms tycoon

Vladimir Yevtushenkov and metals billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov that Russia was already lagging behind China, India and Brazil in developing biotech. "Our job is to change the situation, to create conditions for formation of a powerful biotech sector in Russia," Putin told the meeting, asking the Economic Development Ministry to draft the development strategy in May.

Klepach said the growth potential in the biotech sector was at least the same if not higher than in nanotechnologies, a sector that has enjoyed massive state investment in recent years. He did not put any figures to investment in biotech.

The government approved on Friday 25 so-called "technology platforms," modeled on their European equivalents, which will provide framework and coordination for research and funding. Three of the platforms are linked to biotech.

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