

Trump's White House Ballroom Commissioner to Attend Putin's Speech at St. Petersburg Economic Forum

May 22, 2026



Rodney Mims Cook Jr. **Andrew Harnik / AFP**

The head of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts will travel to Russia next month, becoming the first American official to attend the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) in nearly ten years, Russian state media [reported](#) Friday.

U.S. President Donald Trump [appointed](#) Rodney Mims Cook Jr. as chairman of the federal arts and architecture advisory body in January. As chairman, he has been the key official [overseeing](#) the approval of Trump's controversial White House ballroom extension.

Cook told the news agency RIA Novosti that both SPIEF's organizing committee and the U.S. State Department have cleared his participation at the Russian economic forum, which is scheduled to take place from June 3 to June 6.

"I'm invited to the plenary session and President Putin's address. And I will be in

attendance,” Cook, an architectural designer and developer, was quoted as saying. He added that he also [plans to meet](#) with Russian Culture Minister Olga Lyubimova.

The last U.S. government official to [attend](#) the forum was former Ambassador John Tefft in 2017, during Trump's first term in office. Hundreds of American corporate executives and business leaders attended SPIEF until Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine triggered a Western boycott.

Related article: [Russia Vows 'Total Solidarity' With Cuba and Condemns U.S. Threats Against Island](#)

The Kremlin claims that American and European companies remain interested in SPIEF, but many prefer to keep their involvement private.

Cook's connection to Russia [includes](#) previous cultural exchanges, such as a 2017 speech at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg and various lectures across the country.

According to RIA Novosti, Cook is a Russia specialist at the New York City-based private non-profit World Monuments Fund, and has been involved in the restoration of a replica of The Church of the Holy Sepulchre located outside Moscow. The World Monuments Fund website [states](#) only that Cook is a board member.

The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts has been contacted for comment.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/05/22/trumps-white-house-ballroom-commissioner-to-attend-putins-speech-at-st-petersburg-economic-forum-a92820>