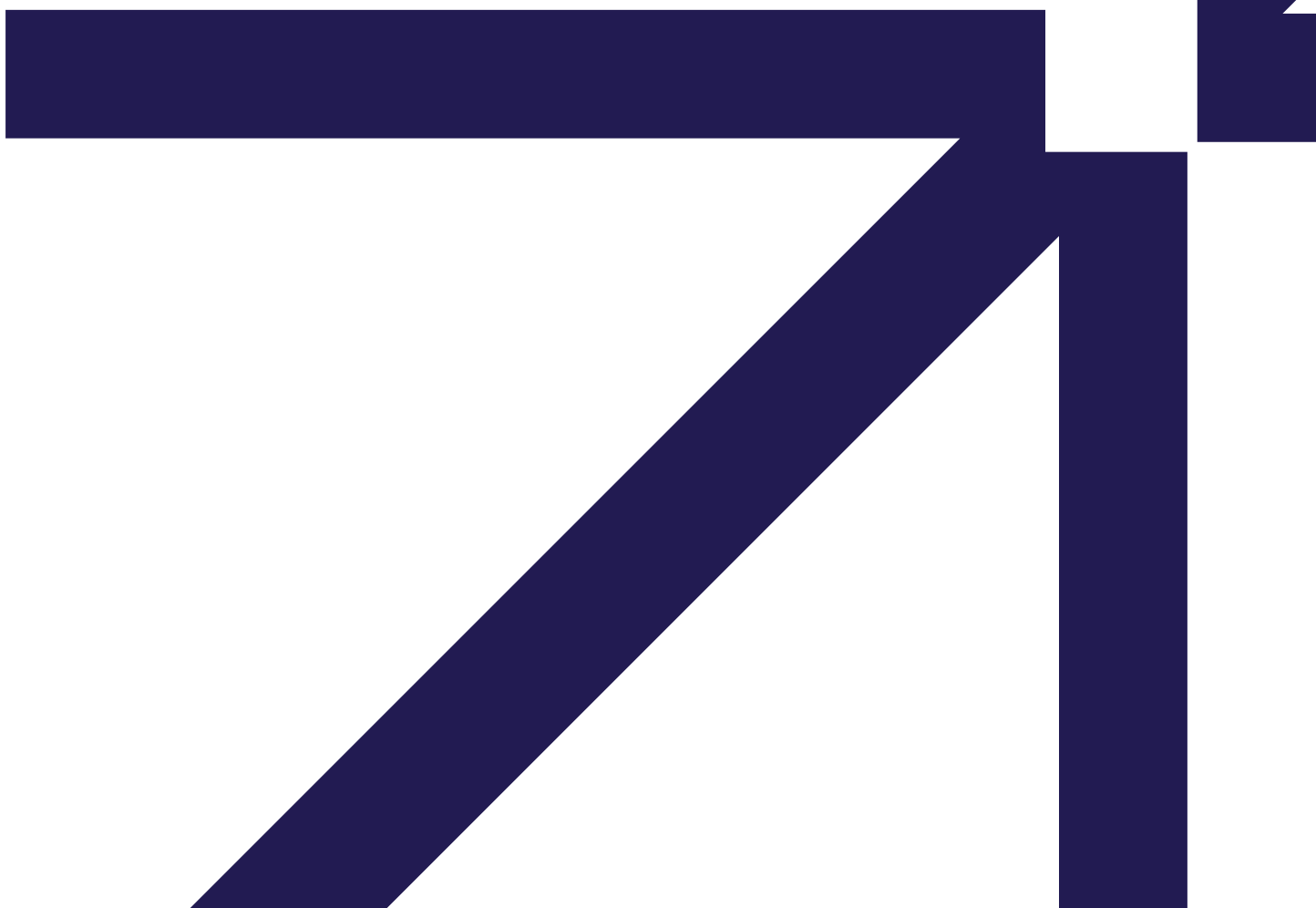


RUSSIA AT A GLANCE

December 2024: Changes of regional governors as a snapshot of current Russian politics



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5 Chronology of the changes

There were few changes in the composition of the regional governors in 2022-23, but in 2024 the Kremlin made a number of new appointments. Five governors have transitioned to federal roles, balancing the interests of major lobbyist groups within ministries. Eight replacements have been made in the regions.

8 Rostov Region

In 2024, Yury Slyusar was appointed the new governor of Rostov Region. He has taken over from Vasily Golubev, who was connected to Gazprom. Slyusar is a manager with links to aircraft construction and the state technical company, Rostec. Slyusar's appointment reflects the Kremlin's pragmatic approach of redeploying experienced managers to positions where they can most effectively serve the system.

10 Komi Republic

The political machine suffered a major setback in Komi after the arrest of the regional elite in 2015. The Kremlin has appointed Rostislav Goldstein as governor, based on his strong performance as the former governor of Jewish Autonomous Region. The idea behind this appointment is to use trusted personnel to re-establish control over the region.

13 Tambov Region

Tambov Region is now led by Yevgeny Pervyshov, the former mayor of Krasnodar and a participant in the 'special military operation' in Ukraine (SMO). He replaced Maxim Yegorov, who is likely to continue his career in the federal structures. The appointment of Pervyshov marks a new era, where representatives of the 'SMO elite' are being integrated into the system of government.

16 Jewish Autonomous Region

Maria Kostyuk's appointment as acting governor of Jewish Autonomous Region is an example of how local personnel are being sent to positions in their native regions. Kostyuk is returning to the region having gained experience at the federal level. In Moscow, she ran the programme 'Time of Heroes', as well as heading the regional department of the 'Defenders of the Fatherland' federal foundation.

17 Collective portrait of the new wave of governors

The average age of this new generation of Russian governors is approximately 50. Kostyuk re-established the mix of genders, becoming the only female governor since the departure of Natalya Komarova. Pervyshov is the first bureaucrat who has served in the war in Ukraine to be appointed to a genuinely senior post, and not merely a symbolic one. The new governors bring substantial managerial experience and strong regional connections. Their appointments in 2024 aim to both tighten the Kremlin's control over the regions and enhance regional governance efficiency.

19 Conclusion

This latest wave of gubernatorial appointments in Russia signifies a return to normality after the uncertainty caused by the war. The Kremlin has carefully selected its candidates to ensure continuity and reward loyalty, while retaining the flexibility to transfer personnel between federal and regional levels.

Chronology of the changes

In 2024, the Kremlin once again began an active reshuffle of personnel, both regional governors and federal officials

When the war started, all civilian appointments were frozen, including those of regional governors. In May 2022, five governors whom the Kremlin did not wish to re-appoint were removed. This was just four months before elections, which gave the new appointees little time to adjust to their new positions.

In the autumn of 2022, there were no personnel changes, contrary to what had become normal practice. At that time, the Kremlin was focused on other issues: the consequences of the Ukrainian counter-offensive and incorporating the occupied territories into the Russian political set-up.

In 2023, the Kremlin made only five gubernatorial changes, four in spring and one in autumn. Alexei Ostrovsky, one of just two governors from the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), and Alexander Burkov, a representative of 'A Just Russia,' were retired. The second LDPR governor, Mikhail Degtyaryov, also 'resigned' in the spring of 2024. As a result, only four of the original seven governors from the nominally 'opposition' parliamentary parties remain in office – three of them represent the Communist Party.

In 2024, the Kremlin no longer limited itself to short-term, essential measures in personnel policy at the regional level, such as last-minute changes. Moscow began to plan a more complex and long-term strategy for managing the regions. In May, an unprecedented gubernatorial 'call-up' began at the federal level.

LOBBYISTS AND TECHNOCRATS

Until this year, there were few examples of governors being moved to senior federal posts.

Among the so-called 'lobbyist governors' who have joined the government, the following should be mentioned:

- The governor of Krasnodar, **Alexander Tkachyov**. One of the major agricultural businessmen in Russia, Tkachyov heads the Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation.

- A former governor of Perm, **Yury Trutnyev**. He was supported by two magnates from Perm in the field of natural resources, Dmitry Rybolovlev (mineral fertilisers) and Andrei Kuzyayev (formerly a major oilman). Trutnev became Minister for Natural Resources.

Among the technocrats, **Dmitry Mironov**, former governor of Yaroslavl and a former presidential aide, was recently appointed as an assistant to Putin – a role that is formally equivalent to that of a federal minister. The governor of Perm, **Maxim Reshetnikov**, who previously served as Minister of the Economy in the Moscow city government, has been appointed Federal Minister of Economic Development.

As a result of the reshuffle this year, the following people have joined the federal government:

- The governor of Kaliningrad, **Anton Alikhanov** former departmental director in the Ministry of Industry and Trade, became Minister of Industry and Trade.
- The governor of Kursk, **Roman Starovoyt**, is now Minister of Transport (previously Deputy Minister).
- The governor of Kemerovo, **Sergei Tsivilyev**, former businessman in the coal industry, is now Energy Minister.
- The governor of Khabarovsk, **Mikhail Degtyaryov**, previously a prominent functionary of the LDPR, is now Minister for Sport.

Alexei Dyumin, the governor of Tula, once an aide to Putin, has been given the post of presidential assistant with a wide portfolio of responsibilities.

In late May/early June, a further three replacements were announced:

- **Vyacheslav Fedorishchev**, who was working as Dyumin's deputy in Tula Region, replaced Dmitry Azarov as head of **Samara Region**.
- **Ruslan Kukharuk**, the former mayor of Tyumen, replaced the head of **Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District**, Natalya Komarova.
- **Andrei Turchak**, secretary of the general council of the 'United Russia' party, replaced Oleg Khorokhordin as head of **Altai Republic**.

The changes introduced in May aimed to establish a new federal government while balancing the interests of key lobbyist groups at the ministerial level. The oligarchs retained their influence: Sergei Chemezov at the Ministry of Industry and Trade via Anton Alikhanov, Arkady Rotenberg at the Transport Ministry through Roman Starovoyt, and Gennady Timchenko at the Energy Ministry via Sergei Tsivilyev.

Three governors were dismissed due to political missteps. Two of them, Azarov and Komarova, were directly responsible, while Khorokhordin's removal was influenced by his predecessor, Andrei Turchak. Turchak was effectively fired from his post of secretary of the general council of 'United Russia', when he failed to have a large number of participants from the war in Ukraine elected as deputies. (See NEST Centre. *November 2024: Are those returning from the war in Ukraine a threat to Putin's 'old' elite?*)

On 4 November, the Day of National Unity, four autumn appointments were added to the eight which had been made in spring and summer. These were in Rostov and Tambov Regions, in Komi Republic and Jewish Autonomous Region. There is no thread of logic running through the autumn appointments. In each case, the rationale behind the appointment varies, whether it involves retirees or the new appointees.

Rostov Region

With the change of governor in Rostov, the region transitioned from Gazprom proteges to Rostec proteges

The Rostov governor, Vasily Golubev, was due to end his term of office in 2025. Golubev was one of the longest-serving governors, along with the head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, the president of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnikhanov, and the mayor of Moscow, Sergei Sobyenin. The Kremlin decided that the time had come for a change in Rostov, and they found a suitable candidate in Yury Slyusar.



Yury Slyusar, Acting Governor of Rostov Region

Slyusar comes from a family of aircraft builders. His father, Boris Slyusar, was the director of the Rostov helicopter construction company, 'Rostvertol', where the younger Slyusar was commercial director before accepting a position in the government. He made a successful career in the Ministry of Industry and Trade, working his way from assistant up to deputy minister with responsibility for the aircraft industry and radio electronics.

In 2015, Slyusar became the president of the United Aircraft Construction Corporation (OAK). It was during Slyusar's time there, from 2018-2021, that OAK gradually came under the control of the state corporation Rostec, led by Sergei Chemezov. The takeover occurred because OAK was underperforming; however, its performance did not improve after becoming part of Rostec.

In 2022, Putin ordered accelerated development of aircraft construction. As a result, the government adopted an ambitious yet unrealistic programme for the sector's growth up to 2030. Western-built airliners were carrying 95 per cent of all passenger flights in Russia. The programme foresaw their replacement with Russian-made aircraft as soon as possible.

The time frame shifted and the programme itself was tweaked, but up until now not a single 'wholly Russian' aircraft has even been tested, let alone brought into production. At the start of 2024, Chemezov announced that the regular production of the MS-21 airplane, which had been planned to begin in 2023-24 would now take place in 2025-26. It is worth noting that the designs for the MS-21 were first drawn up in 1992. (MS-21 stands for *magistralny samolyot XXI veka*, 'Long-range airplane for the 21st century'.)

In a bureaucratic system, whenever anything goes wrong someone has to be blamed. In this case, as the head of OAK, the finger was pointed at Slyusar. Remarkably though, the state system punished this official who had been unable to complete the task by assigning him to another senior position. This new rationale in the Kremlin fits the logic of wartime: rather than simply casting off personnel, you find another field where the manager can be of greatest use to the system. According to this logic, an experienced manager such as Slyusar, who had previously worked in Rostov and whose family roots lie there, would be the ideal candidate for the post of governor.

Rostov is one of the most densely populated regions in the country. It serves as the headquarters for the 'special military operation' and the main base for its logistical support. It is also the home of major aircraft production:

- **Rosvertol**, a subsidiary of Rostec, which produces military and transport helicopters.
- **The Beriyev aircraft plant** in Taganrog, known for manufacturing amphibious aircraft.
- **The Rostov aviation factory**, which produces drones.
- **The Shakhty aircraft repair facility**, which has taken on a particularly crucial role during the war in Ukraine.

If Vasily Golubev was seen as Gazprom's creature when he took over as the governor of the region, then his replacement, Yury Slyusar, represents the interests of Rostec.

Komi Republic

The Kremlin has appointed Rostislav Goldstein as governor to re-establish control in the region that was lost after mass arrests of the elite in 2015

There was a massive political scandal in Komi Republic in 2015. All those at the top of the regional elite were arrested, including the governor, Vyacheslav Gayzer. They were accused of organised crime and misuse of power.

This was the second time in Putin's Russia that a sitting governor had been arrested, and the first ever radical overhaul of the whole regional elite: the governor, his deputy, the chairman of the local parliament and other officials. The exact reasons for this all-encompassing political repression are not clear, but one of the factors was the attack by the *siloviki* (the representatives of the 'power ministries') on the informal 'boss of Komi', Alexander Zarubin, the business partner of Sergei Kiriyenko.

The attack by the *siloviki* failed: Zarubin managed to hide abroad, and Kiriyenko soon became the leader of the Kremlin's domestic policy. However, Komi caused more problems for Kiriyenko in his new incarnation. The republic ceased to vote in the way the Kremlin demanded. After the mass arrests the political machine failed, and the next two governors who were appointed from outside the republic – Sergei Gaplikov (2015-20) and Vladimir Uyba (2020-24) – were unable to keep the local elite in line.

Vladimir Uyba was the founder of the Federal Medical Biological Agency (FMBA), which developed out of the Third Main Directorate of the USSR Health Ministry. The Agency dealt with space medicine, as well as the treatment of pathologies linked to the effects of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

Uyba's successor as head of FBMA was the former Health Minister, Veronika Skvortsova. Under her, the FBMA was answerable directly to Putin, and effectively became an alternative health ministry – for a select group of patients. On the Ukrainian front, the FMBA provides medical services to officials who are advancing their careers by participating in the 'special military operation'. After he left his post in Komi, Uyba was unable to return to FBMA. Instead, he was given a senior medical post in the Ministry of Defence.

Uyba had replaced Sergei Gaplikov as the governor of Komi. Gaplikov had been unable to deal with a number of problems, including the pandemic. At the height of COVID-19 there was a particularly high death rate in Komi. The Kremlin believed that with Uyba's background as an epidemiologist, he would be better equipped to handle the coronavirus. Overall, Uyba managed the pandemic with some success, but he proved ineffective in other areas.

Rostislav Goldstein, Uyba's replacement, was well known in Komi. He started work there as a driver, before joining the Soviet-American venture, 'AmKomi', which was involved in oil extraction. Later, he opened the 'Goldstein' trading house, a food distribution business in the region.



President Putin signed an executive order appointing Rostislav Goldstein Acting Governor of Jewish Autonomous Region. Source: kremlin.ru

At the start of the century, Goldstein entered politics to expand his business across the whole republic. He became a member of the Komi parliament, the chairman of the committee on social policy and deputy parliamentary chairman. When he was chosen as chairman of the committee he was the sole candidate; nevertheless, it took two voting rounds before he secured enough votes.

Goldstein transferred his business to his wife and departed for Moscow to become a member of the State Duma. He studied at the 'Governors' school', after which he was appointed as head of Jewish Autonomous Region. Once in position, he formed his own team, including his colleagues from Komi.

This team created a successful political machine, making Jewish Autonomous Region an exemplary one in the eyes of the Kremlin. By putting Goldstein in Komi, the Kremlin reasserted control over a previously ‘beheaded’ region.

Tambov Region

The appointment of Yevgeny Pervyshov as governor of Tambov Region reflects the new Kremlin strategy to integrate veterans of the Ukraine war

Tambov Region is notable for being an agrarian region, for having a declining population, and for being of little significance at the national level. Maxim Yegorov, the governor appointed in 2021, was also rather insignificant. He was a regional official who then rose to the federal level as part of Vladimir Yakushev's team, which came under the patronage of the mayor of Moscow, Sergei Sobyenin. In 2020, when Yakushev left his post as Minister for Housing and Construction, Yegorov also lost his position as deputy minister. As the governor of Tambov, Yegorov tried to ingratiate himself with the Kremlin in the hope of returning to Moscow.

Yegorov's aspirations may well be realised under the current circumstances. The career of his patron, Yakushev, is now on the rise. He has assumed the roles previously held by the governor of Altai Republic, Andrei Turchak: acting secretary of the General Council of the 'United Russia' Party and first deputy speaker of the Federation Council. Yakushev is now gathering his team around him, and Yegorov could become his deputy, this time on party lines.

A different scenario is also possible. Yegorov is from Nizhny Novgorod Region, which is the home territory of Sergei Kiriyenko. When Kiriyenko was the presidential representative in the region in the early years of this century there was a struggle for political influence in Nizhny Novgorod between 'the industrialists', led by the Communist governor, Gennady Khodyrev, and 'the energy group', whose unofficial leader was Kiriyenko.

At that time, Yegorov was in various management positions in the Nizhnovenergo energy company, and, even though he did not stand out, he was part of 'the energy group'. Insiders in Nizhny Novgorod reckon that the current governor, Gleb Nikitin, is the leading candidate for promotion in the next round of gubernatorial changes, and they say that Yegorov is his most likely replacement.



Yevgeny Pervyshov, Acting Governor of Tambov Region

The new governor of Tambov Region, Yevgeny Pervyshov, is a much more solid figure than his predecessor. Recognised for his management skills, Pervyshov is the first person with experience of the war in Ukraine to be appointed to a senior role, one he is well-prepared to handle. He was the mayor of Krasnodar in 2016-21, served as a member of the Duma from 2021 to 2024, and volunteered to participate in the ‘special military operation’ in October 2022.

According to the news agency TASS, Pervyshov served in the GROM ‘Kaskad’ drone brigade (formerly known as BARS ‘Kaskad’). Other sources say that he was in the people’s militia in the so-called ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’. This seems likely, given that he has military awards from there.

The independent GROM ‘Kaskad’ unmanned aviation brigade is a special unit of the Military Space Forces, where representatives of the elite can show their loyalty and patriotism. They carry out their military service on short-term contracts, for three or six months, far from the frontline in relative safety. Drone operators work along the whole line of combat, and are located 50 to 70 kilometres back.

Pervyshov served in the military without giving up his seat as a deputy, and became one of 83 people chosen for the first group of the ‘Time of Heroes’ special educational project. The programme is based at the Higher School of State Management of the Russian Academy for the Economy and State Service under the President of the Russian Federation.

‘Time of Heroes’ was launched in May 2024 and was set to run for two years. However, after completing a one-month-long training module, an icebreaker voyage to the North Pole, and a stint in the Moscow government, Pervyshov received an expedited appointment as governor in November. A month earlier, the Kremlin had appointed 20 participants in the ‘Time of Heroes’ programme to significant yet non-functional posts. (See NEST Centre. *November 2024: Are those returning from the war in Ukraine a threat to Putin’s ‘old’ elite?*)

Tambov Region has a smaller population than Krasnodar, where Pervyshov served, but the role of governor is more senior than that of a mayor. Pervyshov is one of the pioneers of the ‘war veterans’ elite, including the flashy appointment of Artem Zhoga as presidential representative in the Urals. More appointments of these ‘specially trained’ personnel can be expected. Previously, as part of the ‘Governors’ School’ programme, participants had to crouch beneath a military vehicle as it passed over them on a training ground. Now, in order to hasten their career path, candidates are expected to gain genuine wartime experience, albeit not on the frontline.

Jewish Autonomous Region

Maria Kostyuk took on the role of acting governor of her home region based on her experience and indirect involvement in the war



Maria Kostyuk, Acting Governor of Jewish Autonomous Region. Source: kremlin.ru

Maria Kostyuk, the newly-appointed acting governor of Jewish Autonomous Region, who previously led the ‘Time of Heroes’ programme, can be considered, to some extent, another pioneer of the ‘special military operation’ in power.

In her case, this appointment appears perfectly logical. She was born in Jewish Autonomous Region, and built her career there, rising to the position of leader of the regional government and head of governor Goldstein’s administration.

Her son, Andrei Kostyuk, died in the war, in the first days of the attack on Soledar in August 2022. He was serving in the same unit as Pervyshov, the 2nd guards army corps (previously, the ‘Luhansk People’s Militia’). Andrei Kostyuk was posthumously awarded the medal ‘Hero of Russia’.

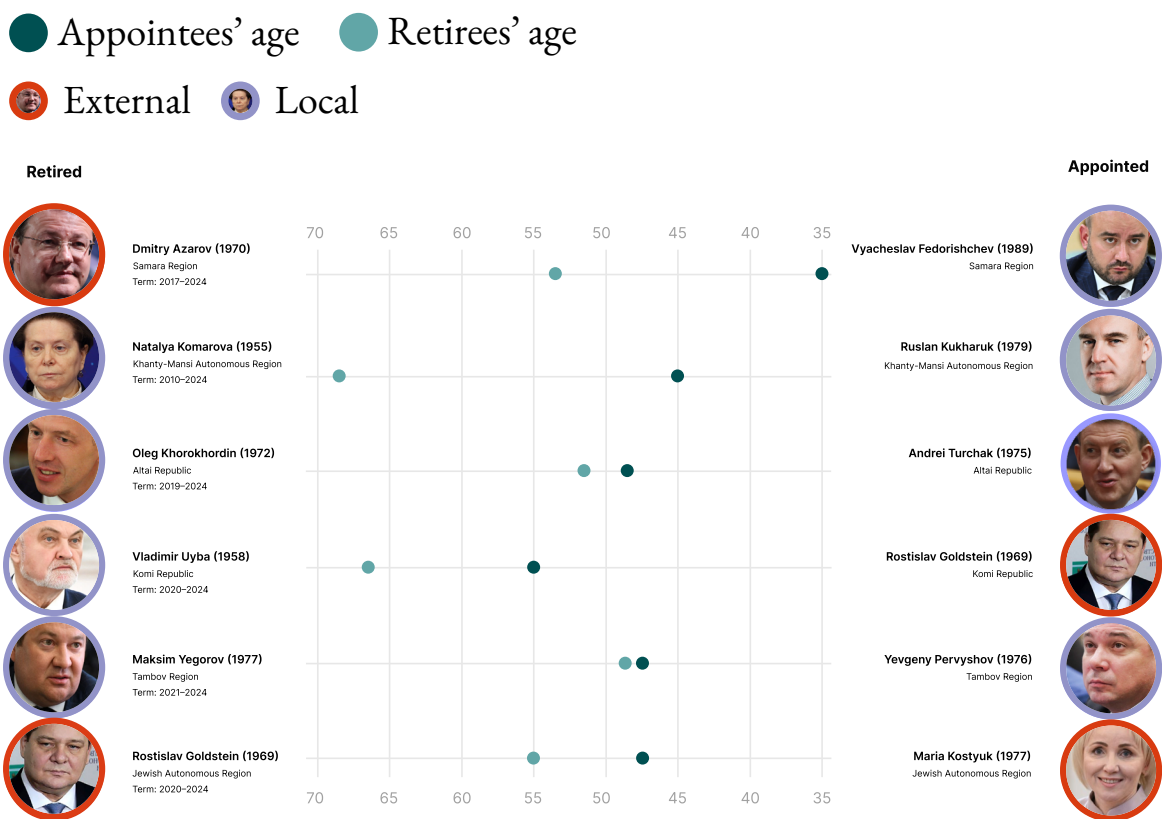
Maria Kostyuk came to Moscow’s attention after the death of her son and the presentation of the medal, and she became the head of the regional directorate of the federal foundation, ‘The Defenders of the Fatherland’, which is led by Putin’s second niece, Anna Tsivilyeva. A year on, Maria Kostyuk has returned to her native region.

Collective portrait of the new wave of governors

The new set of gubernatorial appointees in Russia reflects to the rejuvenation of serving governors and a change in emphasis from control to effectiveness

What is the collective image of the new Russian governor? Each of the two waves of gubernatorial changes, in May-June and in November, reflected a notable switch to younger governors. The new appointees in the first group were on average 16 years younger than those they replaced. In the second group, the difference was nine years. The average age of the new governors is between 45 and 55.

Fig. 1. Old and new governors following the appointments of 2024



As before, there is just one woman among the whole body of governors. Natalya Komarova left her post as governor of Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District, and Maria Kostyuk became the head of Jewish Autonomous Region.

Pervyshov became the first bureaucrat who had taken part in the ‘special military operation’ to be appointed to a fully-functioning senior position.

All of the new heads have experience in leading a team: in a region (Goldstein, Kostyuk and Pervyshov); in manufacturing (Slyusar); and in business (Goldstein).

Each of the new appointees has stronger ties with their regions than their predecessors had at the time of their appointments. Goldstein and Slyusar occupied senior positions in their regions. Apart from the last year, Kostyuk made her way up the bureaucratic ladder in her native region. The one exception is Pervyshov, who has become the third Tambov governor in a row in five years to be appointed externally.

These latest appointments indicate that the balance between control by the Kremlin and the effectiveness of the individual governors has tilted towards greater effectiveness.

Conclusions

This latest round of gubernatorial appointments indicates that after more than two years of war the Kremlin has now turned its attention to internal issues. Internal political life has stabilised. It has not reverted to the old ways, but it has at least become a new normal.

Moscow is selecting governors more carefully than before, aiming to avoid risks and behaving proactively, with an eye to the future. Putin's personnel shuffle seems carefully planned and, on the surface, effective.

Those being moved are immediately taking up new positions. No one is being sidelined, and all resources are being utilised within the system.

In addition, the Kremlin has managed to turn the regions into territorial divisions of one huge corporation. On the one hand, the leaders of the regions are interchangeable with the heads of departments of industry. On the other hand, they and the others who are rotated are obliged to maintain loyalty to the man in the Kremlin who is responsible for their appointment.

The changes in gubernatorial appointments, and the reasons behind them, offer an intriguing insight into the structure of Putin's regime and the way it functions.

About the New Eurasian Strategies Centre (NEST Centre)

Based in London, NEST Centre brings together the best expertise on Russia and the surrounding region. Its mission is to identify the forces shaping Russia's long-term future, analyse their impact and develop strategies to bring about peaceful and positive development of the country.

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