The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Prosecutors Caught in 'Clan War'

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December 20, 2009



Bagmet

The Prosecutor General's Office announced Friday that the head of the Moscow branch of the Investigative Committee, Anatoly Bagmet, had been fired for violating his oath of office.

But Bagmet refused to step aside in an indication, observers said, that a new battle has erupted between Prosecutor General Yury Chaika and the Investigative Committee, which is a part of the prosecutor's office and headed by the independent-minded Alexander Bastrykin, a former classmate of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

"Bagmet is dismissed from the prosecutors' service and from his post for violating the investigator's oath," said a spokeswoman for the prosecutor's office, Marina Gridneva, Interfax reported.

She said the dismissal order was signed Friday.

A prosecutor's office spokesman reached by telephone could not explain what part of the oath

Bagmet was accused of violating.

Late Friday, RIA-Novosti reported, citing an unidentified source in the prosecutor's office, that the dismissal order had been signed by Deputy Prosecutor General Alexander Buksman, who is heading the office while Chaika is on a business trip.

Spokespeople for the Investigative Committee and the committee's Moscow branch declined to comment on the dismissal order Friday.

But Bagmet, who was appointed to the post in May 2007, told Kommersant on Saturday that only his boss, Bastrykin, had the right to dismiss him.

Bastrykin, who was visiting St. Petersburg on Friday, told Bagmet that he would deal with the matter when he returned to Moscow on Monday, Kommersant said, without citing anyone.

Bastrykin promised to fire the heads of 12 regional branches of the Investigative Committee "who work badly" during a meeting with the Federation Council last month. Bastrykin did not say who might be dismissed.

According to the Constitution, the prosecutor's office is a centralized agency whose employees are subordinate to the prosecutor general. However, a clause in the law on the prosecutor's office says even though the Investigative Committee is part of prosecutor's office, its officials are appointed and dismissed under rules set by the Investigative Committee's head.

The prosecutor's office earlier tried to fire Bagmet for accepting a law degree from a university in the Chelyabinsk region, where he previously worked as a deputy prosecutor. The prosecutor's office accused Bagmet of acting illegally in accepting the degree in 2007, and a court case about the issue is ongoing.

The deputy head of the State Duma's Security Committee, Alexei Volkov, said the latest decision to dismiss Bagmet followed an in-depth investigation into his work by the prosecutor's office.

"This attempt to remove Bagmet is simply an episode in an internal fight between the prosecutors' clans. Some group just wants to put its own man into the post," said another member of the Security Committee. He spoke on condition of anonymity, saying he did not want to jeopardize his relationship with Bagmet.

Volkov said he doubted that Bagmet's fate is a chip in any power play between Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev, which some political commentators have started tracing recently.

"I don't think that the leaders of the state are discussing changes within the Investigation Committee with the prosecutor general," he told The Moscow Times.

Removing Bastrykin, who is one of Putin's closest allies, would indicate a conflict between Putin and Medvedev, who is seen as close to Chaika and generally unfriendly to the so-called siloviki clan to which Bastrykin belongs, said Vladimir Pribylovsky, who tracks dynamics between the ruling elites at the Panorama think tank.

But Bagmet, 48, is too low-ranking an official for Putin and Medvedev to be involved, he said.

Igor Trunov, a celebrity lawyer who has participated in several high-profile cases investigated by Bagmet's office, said Bagmet's work was problematic but this was probably not linked to the dismissal.

"The Moscow branch of the Investigative Committee performs and has performed terribly. Saying that its officials have violated their oath is too mild. They violate the criminal law," Trunov said, referring to an attempt earlier this year to pursue criminal charges against investigators accused of stealing personal items kept as evidence from victims of the 2002 Nord-Ost hostage taking.

Trunov said even if Bagmet were dismissed, his replacement would not be any more professional.

Staff writer Alexander Bratersky contributed to this report.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2009/12/20/prosecutors-caught-in-clan-war-a932