

Scandal-Tainted Governor Is Removed by Medvedev

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President Dmitry Medvedev appointed Novosibirsk Governor Viktor Tolokonsky as his new envoy to the Siberian Federal District on Thursday, a reshuffle that rids Novosibirsk of a corruption-tainted leader weeks before key elections.

Tolokonsky will replace Anatoly Kvashnin, a former chief of the General Staff who has held the envoy post since 2004, the Kremlin [said](#).

Tolokonsky will be succeeded by Deputy Governor Vasily Yurchenko, whose popularity United Russia is banking on to attract votes in October elections by placing him at the top of its list of candidates running for the regional legislature, even though Yurchenko is not expected to take a seat.

United Russia snubbed Tolokonsky, a party member for five years, in favor of Yurchenko, 50, who just joined the party last year, when it drew up its party list in August.

Tolokonsky's reputation took a beating this year after two officials close to him were detained in February on suspicion of having links to a local gang blamed for a series of crimes over the past 20 years.

Tolokonsky personally vouched for the two officials, Novosibirsk Deputy Mayor Alexander Solodkin and his father, Alexander Solodkin, who serves as Tolokonsky's aide on sports issues, but investigators still refused to release the men from custody.

Analysts said Thursday's reshuffle gave the authorities an easy way to remove Tolokonsky gracefully.

"It looks like an honorable resignation for Tolokonsky," said Mikhail Vinogradov, an analyst with the Petersburg Politics Fund.

Kvashnin's ouster had been expected because he was one of the least active envoys in the country, Vinogradov said, adding that he had thought Medvedev would replace him with former Chuvashia leader Nikolai Fyodorov, who was dismissed in July after heading the region for 16 years and still has not been appointed to a new position.

"Fyodorov could have given momentum to the [Siberian Federal] District," Vinogradov said. "The appointment just proves that the institute of envoys in Russia is suffering a period of decay."

Kvashnin, 64, who served as head of the General Staff and a deputy defense minister for seven years, fell seriously ill last year and considered resigning to undergo treatment, news reports said at the time.

Kvashnin will be appointed to a new position, the Kremlin said in the statement. It did not elaborate.

Tolokonsky, 53, has governed the Novosibirsk region since 2000. Before that he served as Novosibirsk's mayor for seven years. His current five-year term was to expire in 2012 after he was reappointed as governor by then-President Vladimir Putin in 2007.

Tolokonsky is to step into his new office as presidential envoy on Monday.

The reshuffle is not the first time that Medvedev has moved governors to envoy offices. Last year, Khabarovsk Governor Viktor Ishayev became the first person appointed as presidential envoy to a federal district after serving as governor. Earlier this year, Krasnoyarsk Governor Alexander Khloponin became the presidential envoy to the newly created North Caucasus Federal District.

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