

Reiman Developing Software

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November 07, 2010

The  Moscow Times

Former presidential IT and telecommunications adviser Leonid Reiman has started a new company, ROSA, that will develop free software.

When Reiman worked for the Kremlin, President Dmitry Medvedev often said Russia badly needed its own software for the sake of national security and cost savings.

Reiman's new initiative — which his representative announced last week, RIA-Novosti reported — comes as his first public move after he abruptly resigned in early September. He said at the time that he would focus on using his expertise and not take any government jobs.

According to the ROSA web site, the company is planning to work with medium-sized to large companies “fully or partially migrating to free software use.” Its potential customers may also include original equipment manufacturers to sell them desktop and server operating systems.

Free software, such as the popular OpenOffice.org office suite, is the opposite to proprietary

software and allows for penalty-free distribution. It has come in vogue in the United States not long after it began as a movement 15 years ago.

In Russia, which President Dmitry Medvedev hopes will soon be home to a Silicon Valley of its own, the use of free software has been a subject of controversy: Companies contracted to distribute CDs with operating systems in schools had failed to do so without errors.

Reiman's representative, whom RIA-Novosti didn't identify, said ROSA would develop free software for the Russian market and then work with foreign companies, such as Mandriva, a free software distributions developer that is controlled by the NGI fund. Reiman, who also served as communications minister between 1999 and 2008, is an investor of the 20 million euro (\$28 million) fund, his representative said.

Yevgeny Savin, who heads UNOVA, a web site that specializes in innovations and venture capital news, said ways of monetizing free software include advertising and creating free and proprietary versions of the program.

"This market is growing and with telecoms, well, its boom days are gone," Savin said, referring to Reiman's telecoms background.

Reiman could tap into the market for free software for mobile phones, possibly developing a project similar to Google's Android operating system, Savin said.

According to National Purchase Diary's Mobile Phone Track, Android is installed on 44 percent of all smartphones that were sold in the United States in the third quarter of 2010, up from 33 percent three months earlier.

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