

Opposition Report Decries Graft Under Putin

March 28, 2011

The  Moscow Times

Opposition leaders claimed on Monday that corruption has worsened under Vladimir Putin's rule, and his friends and relatives have abused their positions for personal gain.

Former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov and two other opposition figures presented a report alleging corruption under Putin over the past decade.

Former State Duma Deputy Vladimir Ryzhkov cited data by the Indem think tank, saying corruption increased tenfold between 2001 and 2005 to well over \$300 billion, or a quarter of the economy.

"Corruption is killing the country's economy, welfare, hurts its morals, political system and robs Russia of a future," Ryzhkov told reporters.

The report says a handful of Putin's friends and relatives — all relatively obscure until the 2000s — have accumulated fortunes with the help of state companies. In one of the

examples, Putin's friends came to control a small bank, Rossiya, which received a handful of lucrative assets from Gazprom in the mid-2000s.

The report also highlights the activities of Gennady Timchenko, a low-profile Russian oil trader with Finnish citizenship.

His declared fortune shot up from about \$2 million in 2000 to \$2.5 billion in 2008, according to Forbes magazine. While paying taxes in Switzerland, his company Gunvor exports at least one-third of Russian oil, buying it from state oil companies at preferential rates, the report said.

"All of them got rich at the state's expense," Nemtsov said, referring to Timchenko and Putin's friends involved in managing Gazprom's assets.

There was no official response to the claims. Asked about the allegations in the past, Putin has denied that he has abused his position or helped his friends to accumulate fortunes.

The opposition leaders also decried high spending on maintaining 26 state residences, which according to the report, are at the president's and the prime minister's disposal.

Nemtsov said their lawyers did not find anything defamatory in the report, but he and his colleagues are ready to stand trial for their allegations.

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