

Chaika Defends Record at Tenure's End

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April 27, 2011



Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika **Igor Tabakov**

Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika vigorously defended his record Wednesday as his tenure nears an end amid a turf war that has engulfed his own son.

Chaika told the Federation Council that his office was not engaged in a power struggle with the Investigative Committee and, seemingly contradicting himself moments later, asked for more power to control the actions of investigators.

"We don't have any smear campaign with the Investigative Committee," Chaika said in an annual speech to senators. "We have had some difficulties because of a lack of a clear balance of responsibilities, but they are being resolved since we work for a common cause."

Chaika needs the Federation Council's approval to remain in office once his term ends in June.

President Dmitry Medvedev, who will need to sign off on the Federation Council's decision, has been embarrassed after a dispute between prosecutors and investigators, whose activities

were split into two independent agencies a month earlier, hit the public spotlight.

At the center of the dispute is a criminal case into an illegal gambling ring in the Moscow region that the Investigative Committee says had the support of local prosecutors. Chaika has said he personally reviewed case documents provided by investigators, but his office has refused to bring charges against Moscow region prosecutors, although several were ultimately dismissed.

"This is not about defending one's honor and pride," Chaika said Wednesday, RIA-Novosti reported. "That would be completely out of the question."

But Chaika's own reputation was put in jeopardy after the Investigative Committee said in late March that it wanted to question his son, Artyom, in connection with the gambling case. People working for Artyom Chaika are suspected of acting as middlemen between prosecutors and the gambling ring's owners, Kommersant said March 30. Artyom Chaika, 35, has pursued multiple business interests, co-founding two law firms, a now-defunct wholesaler and an equestrian club.

Chaika requested a meeting with Medvedev after his son was implicated in the case, and Medvedev cautioned him and Investigative Committee chief Alexander Bastrykin to keep their squabble out of the public eye, Kommersant said April 1.

In his speech, Chaika did not mention his son, but, referring to the prosecutors implicated in the case, he said, "Some feel nervous when their children or family are involved."

He also criticized an amendment backed by Bastrykin that would allow the Investigative Committee to file a complaint if prosecutors closed a case submitted by investigators. His office lost its right to open investigations in January when the Investigative Committee was spun off into an independent agency.

"I am strictly against this. I believe that investigators have too much power anyway," Chaika said.

He said prosecutors should have control over investigators. "It is the prosecutor who should control the process of a criminal investigation," he said.

Chaika's plea fell flat with State Duma Deputy Mikhail Grishankov, who said in a telephone interview that such a change would make the prosecutor general an "untouchable figure."

Grishankov, a United Russia member of the Duma's Security Committee, also said independent prosecutors were needed to press charges against crimes committed by prosecutors.

Chaika, meanwhile, complained that prosecutors faced difficulties checking the income declarations of government officials because of a lack of legislation giving them powers to access information about bank accounts and other assets.

"If we want to create order, these measures should be given to the prosecutors by law," Chaika said.

Medvedev ordered officials and their families to release annual income declarations as part of his drive against corruption, and he put the prosecutor's office in charge of checking their accuracy. Only one person, a relatively low-ranking military officer, has lost his job over an income declaration in the three years since the initiative was introduced.

Grishankov, the Duma deputy, said Chaika missed an opportunity to say he supported Russia's adoption of Article 20 of the United Nations anti-corruption convention, which makes it a criminal offense for an official to obtain wealth whose origins cannot be explained. "This would be more effective," Grishankov said.

Prosecutor General's Office spokesman Viktor Potapov told Finam radio that 6,000 government officials have faced disciplinary action over the past year, and 40,000 violations were uncovered, half of them connected to municipal officials.

Alexei Mukhin, a political analyst with the Center for Political Information, said Chaika was trying to convince Medvedev to reappoint him. "But despite his efforts, his statements about a constructive relationship with the Investigative Committee aren't credible," he said. "This is impossible while the war on corruption is going on."

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