

Putin Talks Timchenko and Books

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin publicly addressed a corruption allegation against him for the first time, saying he does not have any relation to the business of Gennady Timchenko, owner of the major oil trader Gunvor.

Putin said he knows Timchenko, co-founder of international energy trader Gunvor Group and an investor in Novatek, from his time working in St. Petersburg.

"Everything related to his business interests is his personal matter. I have never meddled in this and am not going to. I hope he will never poke his nose into my affairs either," Putin said during a conversation with Russian writers and publishers on Wednesday, after prominent author Zakhar Prilepin asked him what he thought about the fact that Timchenko had acquired Finnish citizenship.

"These things are done not because it's good or bad ... but because we don't have a visa-free regime with Europe, and it's not possible to do business otherwise," Putin said. "It's a problem for many businessmen, but 90 percent of them hide the fact that they have a green

card or other citizenship, but [Timchenko] doesn't."

Diplomatic cables publicized by WikiLeaks last year implied that Putin was a co-owner of Gunvor.

Timchenko "came to business not yesterday or the day before yesterday, but just after privatization was allowed," in the early 1990s, Putin said.

"And I am assuring you — I know that a lot has been written on this matter — this happened absolutely without my involvement," Putin said.

The prime minister also responded to a question about Transneft, which was accused by bloggers of losing \$4 billion. Putin said he is certain the company did not commit any criminal offense.

"If there had been something criminally punishable, then I assure you people there would have long been behind bars," Putin said.

At the same meeting, the prime minister apologized to detective story writers for calling their genre "light reading," adding that he simply does not want Russians to lose interest in the classics.

Putin also discussed intellectual property rights. He said a special government commission is tasked with "finding the most efficient legal solutions that would issue guarantees to authors" so that "the digital book market can develop in a civilized and legal way."

When faced with a comment from one writer who said she should have absolute freedom from censorship, Putin responded, "Let everybody have the maximum amount of freedom, but let's not forget about conscience."

(Interfax, Bloomberg)

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