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Business Group Sees Need for New Party

By Khristina Narizhnaya

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Kaliningrad businessman Andrei Demchuk was found on the bank of a lake a little over a year ago, bound and shot dead. The gun was nearby as well as documents strewn inside and outside his BMW X5.

The death was ruled a suicide, and the investigation soon stalled. Demchuk's former business associate has taken over his company under questionable circumstances. Relatives and friends suspect foul play.

Dmitry Suleyev, a Vladivostok pharmaceutical company director and Duma deputy, was accused of illegally selling his company's property and has been under house arrest since August. The charges and arrest are fabricated to pressure Suleyev to give up part of his business, his lawyer says.

These two cases are typical of the 70-plus cases undertaken by the private business association Delovaya Rossia's Business Against Corruption council.

The council, created in February 2011, assists entrepreneurs with court cases that involve corruption, the gravest issue facing Russian businesses.

Businesspeople are forced to spend nearly 10 percent of their annual incomes on bribes, and nearly 70,000 illegal business takeovers are attempted each year in Russia, according to the St. Petersburg Law Institute.

Not surprisingly, fighting graft is on the top of the agenda of every party in the newly reshuffled State Duma.

The United Russia, Communist, Just Russia and Liberal Democratic parties all have similar strategies that include separating government and business, incurring harsher penalties upon those who give or take bribes, monitoring the incomes of government officials and increasing government officials' paychecks.

Yabloko, which does not have any representatives in the Duma, works with Transparency International to help monitor corruption.

Recent anti-bribery legislation, including raising fines for violators, has helped reduce corruption, said Andrei Nazarov, a Delovaya Rossia member and Duma deputy for United Russia. But it will take about five years to bring it down to the levels of other large economies, he added.

No party has a successful plan for fighting corruption, Delovaya Rossia chairman Boris Titov said. A new business-oriented right-leaning liberal party must be created to develop business. As the economy and competition grows, corruption will decrease on its own, Titov said.

None of the parties has an effective policy for business growth, Titov said. The parties are far too leftist to consider economic interests, levying high taxes on business to help fill the pension funds.

"Human rights are nice — but not when you have nothing to eat," Titov said.

The creation of a right-liberal party is in the works, Titov said. It is too early to speculate on who will lead this party. It will be someone completely new, without associations with the 1990s, Titov said, mentioning First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov as a possibility.

Titov called Mikhail Prokhorov, who will run in the upcoming presidential election, "an effective manager."

"There is talk and discussion," Titov said. "It's going to happen — in about a year and a half."

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