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MegaFon General Director to Step Down Early, Possibly Move to Cabinet

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MegaFon General Director Sergei Soldatenkov has been at the helm of one of Russia three biggest telecom giants since 2003. **Maxim Stulov**

MegaFon General Director Sergei Soldatenkov will leave the helm of one of Russia three biggest telecom giants as soon as next week, long before the end of his contract in June, a media report said Thursday.

Ivan Tavrin, who had been tapped to replace Soldatenkov after coming to the company in January as deputy general director, will take over already next week, sources in the company told Vedomosti. Soldatenkov's last working day will be April 23, a person close to the general director said.

Many industry watchers predict that Soldatenkov will take over as Communications and Press Minister when the new government is formed in May. Analysts say his experience after nine years heading MegaFon could be useful. Current Communications and Press Minister Igor Shchyogolev does not have background in a telecoms, but in media.

Industry sources told The Moscow Times that former Microsoft Russia chief and current VTB vice president Olga Dergunova was interviewed by President Dmitry Medvedev for the minister position. The same source said that Soldatenkov was also recently interviewed for the same job, but it was not clear by whom.

Soldatenkov addressed speculation about the possible move to the ministry in an interview with Kommersant in January.

"The same rumors circulated 3 1/2 years ago when Leonid Reiman was stepping down as minister. And it's understandable: I've been working in telecoms for long enough, there are certain results," he told Kommersant. "But nobody offered me this position either then or now, and I hope they won't. A successful manager is not always a successful official," he said.

Soldatenkov, who has headed the company since 2003, has turned MegaFon — which was born out of the country's first GSM operator, St. Petersburg-based North-West GSM — into one of the leading mobile operators.

With about 61 million subscribers across Russia, MegaFon is one of the "Big Three" mobile operators, which also include MTS and VimpelCom, with 69.7 million subscribers and 57 million subscribers, respectively.

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