

Moscow Red Cross Chief Ousted After Scandal

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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The chief of the Moscow Red Cross has been dismissed after a drawn-out battle with members who accused him of misusing Red Cross property and using threats to try to silence them.

Red Cross members voted overwhelmingly to replace Sergei Natarov, a real estate entrepreneur, with Alexander Zharkov, 42, a member of the Public Chamber and a lawyer by training.

Zharkov promised to help the Red Cross regain control of premises that it has lost "because of a poorly formed leadership," referring to Natarov.

The meeting of the Moscow chapter was opened by the chairwoman of the Russian Red Cross, Raisa Lukutsova, who once supported Natarov but later lost confidence in her former protege, Red Cross sources said.

Moscow's Red Cross was disbanded in 2010 and immediately replaced with a new Red Cross headed by Natarov. The murky scheme that precipitated the change riled members of the old Red Cross, who complained of numerous legal violations and went to court.

A Moscow Times report about the court battle last November caught the attention of the International Red Cross, a source within the organization said. The source spoke on condition of anonymity because national Red Cross organizations are independent of each other.

Natarov attended Friday's vote but abstained, saying in an interview that he refused to recognize the meeting as legal.

"I will go to court to defend my rights," Natarov said.

He also complained that The Moscow Times had practiced "character assassination" in the report about him and accused the newspaper of publishing a paid-for article. The Moscow Times does not accept money for articles.

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