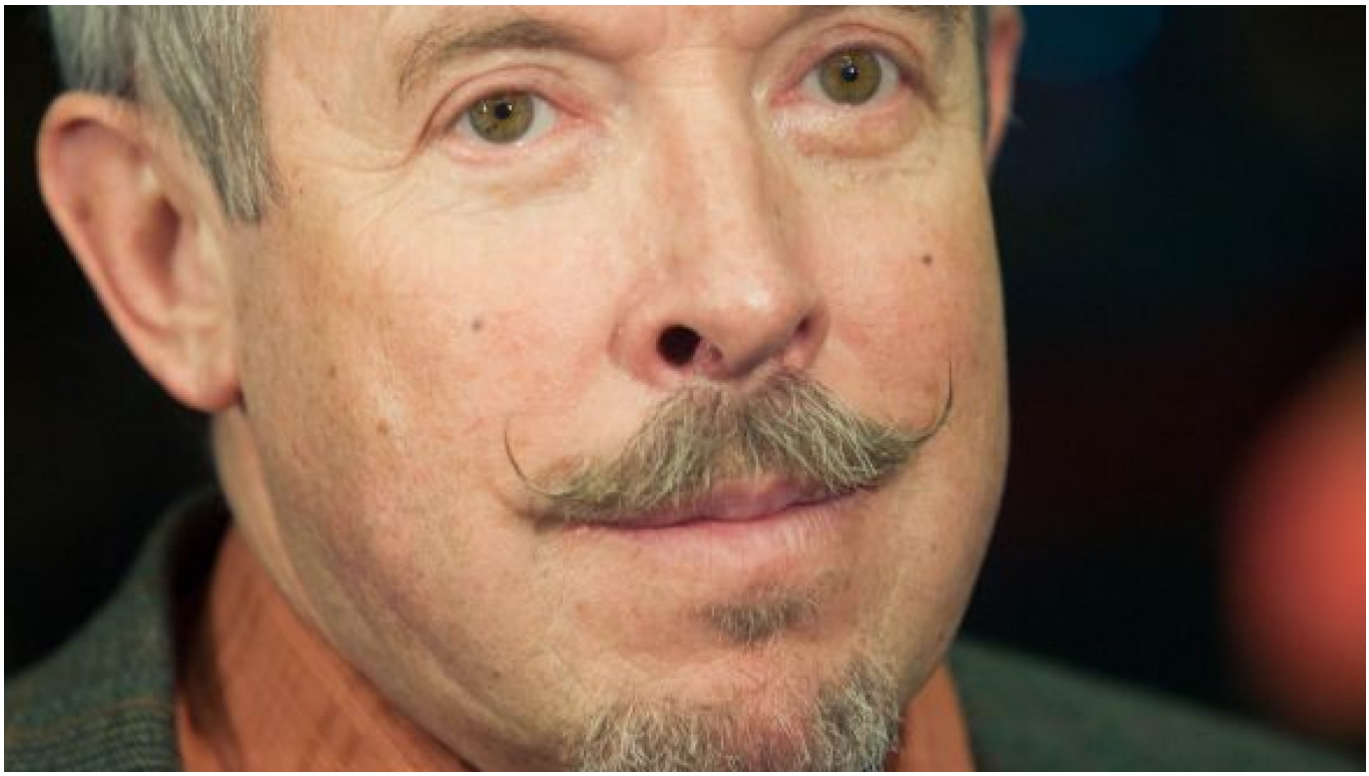
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Rocker Writes to Putin Over Corruption

By Alexander Bratersky

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Mashina Vremeni founder Andrei Makarevich **Andrei Makhonin**

Rock musician Andrei Makarevich, whose trademark song became an anthem for the budding democratic movement of the 1980s, has written an open letter to President Vladimir Putin, saying corruption is spiraling out of control and asking the head of state to take action.

In the letter, which the Moskovsky Komsomolets newspaper published Tuesday, the aging rocker warned Putin that "if the situation [with corruption] doesn't change dramatically, the whole affair smacks of a total catastrophe."

He said that over the last five years the average kickback necessary to facilitate a deal had risen from 30 to 70 percent of the deal's value.

Kickbacks are an almost daily routine in Russia, one of the world's most corrupt nations, according to Transparency International.

Makarevich, 59, who founded pioneering Soviet rock bank Mashina Vremeni (Time Machine)

in the late 1960s, is widely known for his 1979 ballad "Povorot" (U-Turn). The singer also co-owns the Rhythm and Blues cafe in Moscow with several other musicians.

In the letter, Makarevich said people are afraid of appealing to the courts, since "our courts nowadays are either a mechanism for punishing personae non grata or a machine for accepting money."

He added that he addressed Putin personally because “serious changes” could happen only through Putin's "decision.”
Putin, who described Makarevich's intentions as “good” in televised comments Tuesday, said it is a duty for businesses to help the government find “effective measures” to fight corruption.

Putin recently appointed liberal-leaning lobbyist Boris Titov as the country's business ombudsman.

When contacted by The Moscow Times on Tuesday, Makarevich declined to comment on the letter. “I have absolutely nothing to add,” he said.

Makarevich's letter follows his recent advocacy of several prominent political causes.

In the March presidential race, he served as an authorized representative for businessman Mikhail Prokhorov, and in May he took part in the “writers walk” alongside prominent fiction writer Boris Akunin to protest legislation that hiked fines for participation in unsanctioned rallies.

In late June, Makarevich signed an open letter calling for the release of the Pussy Riot punk rockers accused of hooliganism for an anti-Putin performance in a Moscow cathedral.

Asked recently to comment about the political situation in the country, Makarevich said: “You know yourself what is happening.”

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