

Telenor Says Alfa Owns More VimpelCom

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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VimpelCom operates in Russia under the Beeline brand. **Maxim Stulov**

Norway's Telenor said Monday that it has no plans to sell shares in VimpelCom to achieve equal ownership with Russian co-investor Alfa Group, which it says already has effective control over more shares in the mobile phone operator.

"Parity will not mean us selling anything. On the contrary, we think they [Alfa Group] own significantly more than we do," Telenor spokesman Dag Melgaard said.

The two shareholders, at loggerheads over control of VimpelCom, last week moved a step closer to a truce by taking nearly equal stakes in the group, which holds a quarter of Russia's mobile market but earns the bulk of its revenue abroad.

Alfa's Altimo unit raised its holding to 40.5 percent recently and urged Telenor to sell it some of its own VimpelCom stake, which is set to rise to 43 percent as a result of an options deal.

But Telenor claimed that a 6 percent stake held Ukrainian tycoon Viktor Pinchuk should be counted as part of the Alfa stake.

"We believe that the stake held by Ukrainian oligarch Viktor Pinchuk's investment company are actually shares parked by Altimio. So we consider that Altimio's stake is actually 46.5 percent," Melgaard said.

The parity ownership is seen as a precondition for withdrawal of a Russian regulator's lawsuit challenging the dominant position of Telenor in VimpelCom, whose Russian unit is considered by the Russian government a "strategic asset."

Yevgeny Dumalkin, vice president of Altimio, denied that Pinchuk was acting in Altimio's interests. Representatives of Pinchuk were not immediately available for comment.

Pinchuk company EastOne, which controls Ukraine's biggest steel pipe producer, Interpipe, bought the stake via its investment vehicle, Bertofan Investments, in January.

The seller, Oleg Kiselyov, had owned the VimpelCom shares only since June 2011, when he bought the stake, equal to 5.99 percent of all VimpelCom outstanding voting shares, from Altimio.

Melgaard said Telenor had informed the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service of its position regarding Altimio's alleged affiliation with Pinchuk.

"What their stand is on this remains to be seen. The lawsuit is still active," Melgaard said. "We have not agreed to anything as of yet."

The watchdog's lawsuit, filed in April, aims to overturn Telenor's February purchase of shares in VimpelCom, which took its shareholding above Altimio's. The monopoly regulatory agency is seeking an out-of-court settlement of the case.

The agency said Friday that it was too early to talk about withdrawing the lawsuit, although it welcomed the deal in which Altimio raised its VimpelCom stake.

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