

Gudkov Shows He's No Hometown Businessman

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Gennady Gudkov

KOLOMNA, Moscow Region — Facing the loss of his legal immunity following accusations of improper business interests, Duma Deputy Gennady Gudkov threw open the doors of one of the companies in question Thursday.

According to the Investigative Committee, Gudkov has been involved in the management of the Kolomensky Stroitel construction materials market in Kolomna, 114 kilometers from Moscow.

While it is legal for state officials to own a business, they cannot profit from the company or be directly involved in its activities.

Gudkov denies all allegations of improper conduct and has said he will sue the Investigative Committee for libel. The Just Russia party member maintains that pressure from the security

agencies is a direct result of his role in organizing recent opposition protests.

"With Gennady Vladimirovich [Gudkov] I simply have a super-friendly relationship," said Sergei Galkin, director of Kolomensky Stroitel, which generates revenue from renting out space to traders selling building materials.

Galkin has known Gudkov, a former KGB officer, for 49 years. Kolomensky Stroitel has between 50 and 60 tenants, employs five people and the market's monthly income never exceeds 1 million rubles, he said.

The gross annual income of the company is between 1.2 million and 1.4 million rubles, Gudkov told reporters Thursday. And he said he does not even own the company — in 2009 he transferred ownership to his wife, Maria Gudkova.

Gudkov, 56, was born in Kolomna, from where he began his political career and bought Kolomensky Stroitel in 2007. He said FSB officers from Moscow had been assigned to investigate the company, which is also currently being checked by tax inspectors and fire safety officers.

Some of the profits from the company go towards the maintenance of a Just Russia office on the premises, which addresses complaints and enquiries from local citizens.

In stressing the humble nature of his business, Gudkov appeared to be attempting to counter a portrait of him in state-controlled media as a millionaire who used his position to promote his commercial interests across Europe.

The Investigative Committee has also accused Gudkov of illegal connections to textile producer Roshan and business links in Bulgaria. The deputy sold his successful security firm Oskord under pressure in July.

The allegations against him are being developed as part of a campaign to cripple the political opposition ahead of a planned rally in Moscow on Sept. 15, Gudkov said, adding that he did not exclude that he could be arrested.

"Today's repression unfortunately comes from the highest levels of political leadership," he said.

The Duma Commission for Control of the Credibility of Deputies' Declarations will look at Gudkov's case on Sept. 6. A plenary session of the Duma on Sept. 12 could strip Gudkov of his legal immunity.

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