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Putin Fires 5 Senior Police Officials

By Alexander Bratersky

October 30, 2012



Five senior police officials were fired by President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday in what appears to be the continuation of a reshuffle started by Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev in May, the Kremlin said.

Lieutenant-General Mikhail Turkin, who headed the Interior Ministry's communication systems department and prior to that served as deputy head of the Federal Migration Service, was the most publicly known official among the five officials laid off Tuesday.

Turkin also is the vice president of the Dynamo hockey team, which is overseen by the Interior Ministry. He headed the club, part of the Kontinental Hockey League, until this summer, when he was replaced by billionaire Arkady Rotenberg, a childhood friend and judo partner of Putin.

A Dynamo spokesman said Turkin would continue to serve as vice president of the club. "Everything is the same as it was before," he said by telephone.

But an influential United Russia deputy, Alexander Khinshtein, said on Twitter that a criminal

investigation might be opened into Turkin over the purchase of ministry equipment worth 3.9 billion rubles ($125 million) that has been "gathering dust for a year already," Khinshtein said.

Khinshtein said Kolokoltsev canceled plans by Turkin to purchase similar equipment for the department.

The other dismissed officials include Andrei Florinsky, the No. 2 official in the ministry's operations department; Yury Khrapkov, the No. 2 official in the missing persons department; Dmitry Morozov, the No. 2 official in the medical and technical supplies department; and Ivanovo region police chief Alexander Zabegalov.

While the Constitution stipulates that the president must sign all senior police dismissals since he oversees the Interior Ministry, Tuesday's development was seen as a continuation of Kolokoltsev's work to rid the ministry of allies of his predecessor, Rashid Nurgaliyev, who was dismissed in May.

Kolokoltsev also called for minor theft to be declassified from a felony to a misdemeanor, saying in an interview published Tuesday in Moskovsky Komsomolets that this would allow the police to concentrate on more serious crimes.

He said pickpockets should still be punished as felons, but a crime like shoplifting an item worth less than 1,000 rubles ($30) should be treated as a misdemeanor. Currently, small-time shoplifters face a maximum penalty of 15 days in jail.

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