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Putin Names United Russia Heavyweight Acting Moscow Region Governor

By The Moscow Times

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President Putin offering Andrei Vorobyov the post of Moscow region governor during a meeting in the Kremlin on Thursday.

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday appointed Andrei Vorobyov, head of the ruling United Russia party's State Duma faction, to the high-profile post of acting Moscow region governor.

On Tuesday, Putin appointed the region's former governor, Sergei Shoigu, defense minister in place of Anatoly Serdyukov, amid an ongoing corruption scandal at the ministry.

At a meeting with Putin on Thursday, Vorobyov said he would fulfill Shoigu's plan for developing the region.

"This is a very important region of our country: 7 million people, science, industry, culture," Putin told Vorobyov. But he said there are "very many problems" in the region, too, including financial and social issues.

Shoigu, a long-time Putin ally who is best known for having served as emergency situations minister for more than 15 years, had been seen as a strong governor during his short stint in the position. Putin had appointed him to lead the region in March.

Vorobyov, 42, becomes the second heavyweight politician following Shoigu to be governor of the prominent region, where many wealthy Muscovites have homes and land is expensive.

The new acting governor was an aide to Shoigu in 2000 when the latter served as a deputy prime minister, according to Vorobyov's biography on the United Russia website.

Vorobyov's father, Yury Vorobyov, co-founded a government emergency situations committee in 1990 that later became the ministry Shoigu led.

Vorobyov had served as a Duma deputy with the ruling party since 2003 and has headed an interregional public fund of United Russia's supporters since 2000.

Talkative and flamboyant, he emerged as a prominent figure for United Russia after disputed parliamentary elections in December that sparked protests and rancor toward the ruling party.

In 2011, Vorobyov posted income of more than 2 million rubles ($63,400) for himself and nearly 16 million rubles for an unidentified child of his. He also declared three land plots and a Mercedes Benz S 500 registered in his name and an apartment and parking spot registered in his child's name.

From 1998 to 2000, he headed the Russian Fish Company, part of the Russkoye Morye group, which produces a popular brand of cured salmon. Media reports said Vorobyov co-founded it with his younger brother Maxim.

In September of last year, billionaire and Putin acquaintance Gennady Timchenko acquired 30 percent of Russkoye Morye, Vedomosti reported.

Because of his membership in the ruling party, Vorobyov stands little chance of being chosen to continue leading the Moscow region in next fall's election, independent pundit Dmitry Oreshkin told news agency Rosbalt.

That election is expected to be hard-fought, with opposition politicians already beginning to jockey for the chance to run.

In the Duma, Vorobyov had worked in committees dealing with nongovernmental and religious groups, as well as education and science.

Vorobyov has a Ph.D. in economics and wrote a dissertation focused on developing the investment potential of Russia's southern regions. He also has an MBA from the Higher School of Economics.

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