The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Wave of Resignations Foreseen in Duma

By Yekaterina Kravtsova

February 21, 2013



Vladimir Pekhtin

The resignation of senior United Russia lawmaker Vladimir Pekhtin following accusations from opposition leader Alexei Navalny that he owned undeclared property in the U.S. triggered speculation that more lawmakers would quit their seats, throwing the ruling party into crisis.

Pundits said Thursday that with lawmakers facing an increasing barrage of incriminating evidence from opposition activists, the Kremlin would try to clean up United Russia — before reputational damage could affect the country's top leadership.

On Friday the Duma will consider a resignation claim from United Russia Deputy Anatoly Lomakin, who announced his decision to leave the Duma a few hours after Pekhtin's speech. Lomakin may become the fourth United Russia deputy to recently quit the Duma after Pekhtin, Vasily Tolstopyatov, who quit Tuesday, and Alexei Knyshov, who left in October.

"Sooner or later the Kremlin will have to do away with United Russia because it has turned into a burden," said Yury Korgunyuk, an analyst with the INDEM think tank. "It used to be

an instrument of control, and now it's an instrument of discreditation and shame and the Kremlin understands that," he said.

Federation Council Vice Speaker Svetlana Orlova said Thursday that Pekhtin's resignation symbolized a policy of self-clarification of the ruling party.

"President Vladimir Putin is gradually implementing the goals that he stated during his campaign. The recent events and criminal cases on embezzlement in the Defense Ministry, as well as a number of other high-profile corruption cases, demonstrate the authorities' tough position on this issue," she told Interfax.

Orlova added that the resignation was a systemic work not a single-step attack. She did not exclude that such a policy would reach the Federation Council. The Kremlin is ready to oust everyone who could discredit it, she said.

A Just Russia party leader Sergei Mironov told Interfax on Wednesday that the current Duma would set a record for the number of deputies resigning.

Alexei Navalny said in an interview with Moskovsky Komsomolets on Thursday that he possessed information about three more Duma deputies who had undeclared property abroad, one of whom was not a United Russia member. He also also said lots of people volunteered to find such information.

Two of them are apparently Vladislav Tretyak, who has property in Miami, and Andrei Isayev, who owns property in Germany. Isayev, though, told RIA-Novosti that he had no intention to leave the Duma.

Vedomosti reported on Thursday, citing a source in the presidential administration, that six United Russia deputies may resign on the same grounds that Pekhtin did.

Meanwhile, the mysterious blogger Doctor Z, who gave Navalny the purported evidence on Pekhtin, disclosed his true identity: Andrei Zayakin, a Russian-born physics professor at Spain's Universidade de Santiago de Compostela.

Maria Lipman, an expert within the Carnegie Moscow Center, said by phone that more people would be involved in the activity of finding information on deputies who violate law. "There is a growing excitement among ordinary people to expose Duma deputies," she said.

Speculation has swirled that Kremlin discontent with United Russia may be a sign that in the future a new ruling party may be formed.

"There is no sign that United Russia has become pertinent in the political environment, and its leader Dmitry Medvedev in no way shows participation in its work, as well as Putin himself," Lipman said.

Vyacheslav Lysakov, a Duma deputy and member of the Putin-created All-Russia People's Front, said by phone that Putin had earlier announced that the question of making a party from the Front was not on the agenda.

"We have not still registered as a civil movement," he said. "This issue will be decided at our

meeting in June. That is why we're now choosing the leader and forming committees."

Duma Deputy Dmitry Gudkov, a member of A Just Russia, told Gazeta.ru that Pekhtin's resignation might signal the beginning of a split in the ruling elite.

"Inside of United Russia there are people who feel an advantage to ratting out someone — for example, the All-Russia People's Front, which can be strengthened if United Russia weakens," Gudkov said.

The prospect of party members leaving the Duma also fueled speculation that this could give more weight to the All-Russia People's Front while weakening United Russia.

The Front was created by Putin two years ago amid sagging support for the ruling party, whose leadership he subsequently handed over to Medvedev.

The Front enabled Putin-loyalists to enter the parliament on United Russia's ticket in the December 2011 Duma elections without joining the party. The 238-strong United Russia faction currently contains 82 People's Front members.

Vladimir Gutenyov, a senior Front figure and Duma deputy, said Thursday that the movement would use the situation to boost its presence in the parliament.

"Now we have a serious opportunity to increase the number of our supporters in the Duma," Gutenyov told reporters.

He said that Pekhtin could be replaced by Nikolai Kalistratov, a former director of the Sevmash nuclear submarine plant.

Kalistratov was fired by then-President Medvedev in 2011 amid criticism that the military-industrial complex was not working efficiently.

Gutenyov, who is first deputy head of the Duma's Industry Committee, was speaking at the sidelines of a meeting of the All-Russia Machinery Union, a powerful industrial lobby headed by Putin ally Sergei Chemezov.

Kalistratov currently heads the Federal Arctic University's Arkhangelsk branch, which was the Arctic region that Pekhtin represented in the Duma.

Chemezov told Thursday's meeting that bringing more Machinery Union members into regional and federal assemblies remained a No. 1 priority. "Our central task is to work within lawmaking bodies," he said.

With Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin and Deputy Defense Minister Dmitry Borisov among its allies, the All-Russia Machinery Union is seen as the most powerful part of the People's Front, which consists of some 50 public organizations.

Contact the author at e.kravtsova@imedia.ru

Staff writer Alexander Bratersky contributed to this report.

Related articles:

- 6 United Russia Lawmakers Expected to Resign, Report Says
- United Russia Declines Offer to Debate Navalny
- Pekhtin Quits Duma Amid Scandal

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/02/21/wave-of-resignations-foreseen-in-duma-a21782