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Titov Wants to Free 100,000 Jailed Entrepreneurs

By The Moscow Times

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An initiative by business ombudsman Boris Titov to free more than 100,000 entrepreneurs serving prison sentences for white-collar crimes will be submitted to the State Duma next week, Kommersant reported Wednesday.

Titov warned that many people were likely to oppose the idea, but he acknowledged that without such a measure it would be difficult to overcome the remnants of the "turbulent 1990s."

Titov also told Kommersant that some 600,000 criminal cases had been opened against entrepreneurs in the last three years and that 110,924 of them had led to prison terms.

In most cases, the businesspeople had been brought to justice for crimes that didn't actually harm anyone, he said.

A Just Russia said Wednesday that it would back the legislation.

"Law enforcement authorities are often used to put pressure on entrepreneurs in order to control their businesses, and then they end up in prison," said Mikhail Yemelyanov, first deputy head of the Duma's Economic Policy, Innovative Development and Entrepreneurship Committee.

Yemelyanov, a deputy for A Just Russia, added that his party was going to support Titov's initiative, Interfax reported.

The amnesty will cover 53 legally defined crimes, among which fraud, embezzlement and property damage will be the most controversial ones, Titov's office said.

The implementation of the initiative is planned to coincide with Entrepreneur's Day, a non-public holiday, on May 26.

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