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Abramovich Gives Up Role in Russian Politics

By The Moscow Times

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Billionaire Roman Abramovich will leave his post as chairman of the Chukotka autonomous district parliament, Vedomosti reported Tuesday.

Abramovich had been Chukotka's Duma speaker since 2008. He also served as the Far East district's governor from 2000-08.

A United Russia source said that his decision is driven by the presidential decree that orders elected officials to get rid of their foreign property if they want to hold office in Russia.

He has synchronized his move with the decision of his protege Roman Kopin to step down from his position as the district's governor and run for another term in the gubernatorial elections in autumn.

Abramovich, whose wealth is estimated by Forbes Russian edition at $10.2 billion, owns

Chelsea Football Club, which he bought in 2003.

His decision could have been influenced by the decision of Larisa Ponomaryova, another of his allies, to leave her post as district's representative in the Federation Council, a Vedomosti source said.

Ponomaryova announced her decision Monday, saying that she wants to make way for younger people. She is the mother of Ilya Ponomaryov, who is a State Duma deputy for the left-leaning A Just Russia party and is also a leading opposition activists.

Abramovich's spokesman John Mann has not commented on the reports.

The post of Chukotka Duma speaker will be assumed by Abramovich's ally — former regional deputy governor Aramais Dallakyan.

While the post of the regional Parliament is seen as largely ceremonial, it gave Abramovich a degree of political clout and helped him maintain contacts within the government.

The businessman is popular in Chukotka, about 7,000 kilometers northeast of Moscow, due to the financial support he has given the poor region.

His oil company Sibneft was registered in the region before it was purchased by Gazprom, which moved its headquarters to St. Petersburg in 2005.

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