

346 Reports Later, Stepashin Steps Down from Audit Chamber

By [Alexander Panin](#)

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Sergei Stepashin

Audit Chamber chief Sergei Stepashin, who is being replaced by presidential aide Tatyana Golikova, said goodbye to his colleagues at the chamber's headquarters in downtown Moscow on Tuesday, to a round of applause and the patriotic marching tune "Farewell of Slavyanka."

Stepashin, who earlier headed the Interior Ministry and the Cabinet, has been in charge of the chamber since 2000, having been re-appointed in 2005 and 2011. He has lamented the disconnect between the gravity of violations uncovered by his organization and the limited ramifications suffered by the bureaucrats responsible.

The latest law on the Audit Chamber, openly supported by Stepashin himself and adopted in April, gives more power to the agency, making it the supreme external financial oversight authority over federal institutions.

The new legal framework also prohibits anyone from running the chamber for more than two six-year terms.

Over the years, the chamber has become the president's watchdog, conducting a series of inquiries into the business of state companies, large investment projects and budget expenditures under the control of the head of state.

"Our first fundamental research was to evaluate privatization history over the period from 1993 to 2003," Stepashin said.

The result, he said, was that those who acquired their property legally could keep it while several assets that had been seized unlawfully, including nuclear naval units, were returned to the government.

The audit chamber also took a firm position against the privatization of Russian Railways, which was promoted by several top government officials.

Some of the inquiries by the chamber's auditors made headlines, while the results of others remain unknown.

"The head of state has been informed on the results of audits of Rusnano, Oboronservis, the Asia-Pacific Economic Summit in Vladivostok, preparations for the Sochi Olympics, Skolkovo [and] the situation with public utilities. Last year alone, Vladimir Putin received 20 reports [from us] and 346 have been sent to the President since 2000," Stepashin said.

But while the auditors' inquiries addressed many alleged wide-scale corruption cases, not one top government official or private individual associated with fraud has so far been put behind bars.

Former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov is considered only a witness in the criminal case on corruption at the ministry-controlled company Oboronservis.

Overspending at Rusnano and on preparations for the APEC summit in Vladivostok and the Sochi Olympics have not resulted in prosecution of top officials.

The Audit Chamber said it investigated violations in 2012 totaling 780 billion rubles (\$23 billion).

"So far, the magnitude of the violations that we reveal does not match the measures taken to overcome them and to make the officials involved responsible," Stepashin said earlier while presenting the chamber's results for 2012.

His successor, former Health Minister Tatyana Golikova, said in an interview with Russia 24 television channel that wasteful government spending was her main concern. She said the Audit Chamber should not just oversee budget expenditure, but also participate in the formation of laws that would determine the grounds for it.

"The main issue today — and I agree on this with Tatyana Golikova — is to assess current economic policy," Stepashin said.

He recalled the time when he was the prime minister and the Cabinet was struggling to survive with oil prices being as low as \$9 per barrel. "We then thought that if the price were to go up to \$20 per barrel we would be a rich country. It is now \$110 — and we still ask the same questions."

Stepashin also said great attention should be given to the public utilities system.

Another suggestion that the former chamber head made for his successor was to reanimate the Fitol satiric television series that first aired in 1962 and criticized bureaucracy and corruption in the government. The series was discontinued in 2008.

As for his next job, Stepashin dispelled earlier media reports that he might be tipped to become Moscow State University rector. "Though this is an interesting position," he added.

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