

Putin Replaces Stavropol Governor

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Putin speaking with Vladimir Vladimirov, the new governor of Stavropol.

President Vladimir Putin has appointed a replacement for Stavropol region Governor Valery Zerenkov, whose one-year-long tenure in the post was marked by turmoil.

In Zerenkov's place, Putin appointed Vladimir Vladimirov, formerly a first deputy governor of the oil- and gas-rich Yamal-Nenets autonomous district, as interim head of the region. At a meeting in the Kremlin on Friday, the president reminded Vladimirov that Stavropol was itself a "rich and very promising" region.

"It is true, with its own difficulties, with its own issues, which require a solution, moreover a thorough solution, and as quickly as possible," Putin said, a transcript of his comments posted on the Kremlin website stated.

At the Stavropol region legislature Friday, North Caucasus Federal District presidential envoy Alexander Khloponin said Zerenkov had resigned for health reasons and praised his work as governor, noting that he had done "quite a lot" for the region.

“It was rather comfortable working with him. We had plans and projects,” Khloponin said, Interfax reported.

But speculation that Zerenkov would be dismissed had swirled from the moment he was appointed by then-President Dmitry Medvedev in May 2012, Kommersant reported.

Experts say that one of Zerenkov's main failings was the inability to ease ethnic conflict in the region, which boiled over in a series of nationalist demonstrations in December 2012 and January 2013 following the killing of a local resident by a Chechen native.

Zerenkov, a former State Duma deputy from Stavropol and member of United Russia's supreme council, was also widely blamed for a drop in his region's investment rating.

His replacement, Vladimirov, 37, joined government service in 2010. Before that, he held prominent positions in subsidiaries of powerful state-owned energy companies Gazprom and Rosneft, as well as at privately owned LUKoil.

Although a Stavropol native, Vladimirov went to college in the republic of Bashkortostan, graduating from Ufa State Oil and Gas University in 1997. Stavropol is not well-known for its oil and gas industry, with agriculture a bigger focus in the southern region of 2.8 million people.

In contrast to Vladimirov's former region, the Yamal-Nenets autonomous district, which had the highest per capita income in the country in 2011 at more than 50,000 rubles per person, Stavropol is in the bottom third of Russian regions in that category, with per capita income of under 15,000 rubles.

Joining Khloponin at the Stavropol legislature on Friday, Vladimirov emphasized his ties to the region in comments to deputies.

“This is my homeland: I was born here, grew up here. My mother, practically my whole family is here, my roots are here. That is very important. That will allow me to get closer to you from the outset,” Vladimirov said.

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