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Putin Fires Military Commander Over Bribe Charges

By The Moscow Times

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Vladimir Chirkin

President Vladimir Putin has fired Ground Forces commander Vladimir Chirkin, after the Investigative Committee charged the lieutenant general with bribe-taking, a news report said Thursday.

Chirkin's supposed wrongdoings took place between late 2010 and early 2012, when he served as commander of the Central Military District, Kommersant reported. The years came during the tenure of former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, when corruption was supposedly rampant at the ministry.

Investigators released no details of their case against Chirkin. But some unidentified officials told Kommersant that he might be suspected of receiving kickbacks for the sales of land and buildings owned by the military at below market prices.

The inquiry against Chirkin began in October, and investigators appealed to Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to suspend the commander, saying that he could use his senior position to manipulate witnesses and obstruct the investigation.

Shoigu offered Chirkin a chance to resign and the military submitted a draft decree ordering his dismissal to the Kremlin, an unidentified Defense Ministry official said. Putin's order to dismiss Chirkin hasn't been published on the Kremlin's website, but this would be in line with the administration's usual practice of releasing only some presidential orders.

Investigators have opened scores of inquiries into supposed embezzlement and abuse of power at the Defense Ministry under Serdyukov. The former minister has been charged with negligence, but the amnesty passed by the State Duma on Wednesday may exonerate him.

Unlike Serdyukov, Chirkin is unlikely to benefit from the amnesty, because charges against him are considered a serious felony that isn't covered by the pardon, Kommersant reported.

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