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Indicted Billionaire Firtash Offers to Help Fix Ukraine Crisis

By The Moscow Times

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Ukrainian billionaire Dmytro Firtash is ready to act as a negotiator between Russia and Ukraine.

Ukrainian billionaire Dmytro Firtash, charged with bribery in the U.S. and currently awaiting an extradition hearing in Vienna, said that he is "ready to act as a negotiator between Russia and Ukraine," Bloomberg reported Tuesday.

"I know what to do. If Ukrainian politicians are impotent, I have to step in," Firtash said. The businessman said that his connections to Russian state-run oil giant Gazprom and its affiliate Gazprombank, as well as his friendship with Russian construction magnate Arkady Rotenberg, a close ally of President Vladimir Putin, give him a unique position from which to broker a resolution to the Ukrainian crisis.

Gazprom, Gazprombank and Rotenberg all declined Bloomberg's requests for comment.

Firtash is now in Vienna awaiting an extradition hearing on U.S. bribery changes after paying

the largest recorded bail in Austrian history — 125 million euros ($172 million).

Russian billionaire Vasily Anisimov, a business partner of Rotenberg, loaned the bail money to Firtash, who had to put up real estate assets in Ukraine as security, one of Firtash's U.S. lawyers, Lanny Davis, said.

In the interview with Bloomberg on May 10, Firtash said that the U.S. charges in connection with a $500 million titanium enterprise in India were fabricated in order to neutralize his political clout in Ukraine leading up to the May 25 presidential election.

A spokesman from the office of U.S. Attorney Zachary Fardon denied any connection between the Firtash case and the political situation in Ukraine.

Firtash rose to wealth and power as an intermediary for Gazprom in Ukraine and now owns television stations and fertilizer factories across his home country.

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