The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin's Billionaire Ally Timchenko Accuses U.S. Of Preparing 'Provocation' Against Him

August 01, 2014



Gennady Timchenko

Gennady Timchenko, a billionaire with close ties to President Vladimir Putin, has accused U.S. intelligence agencies of preparing a "provocation" against the businessman, news website Newsru.com reported Friday, citing an interview due to be published by ITAR-Tass next week.

Saying he had "concrete information" giving him reason to seriously fear harassment by U.S. intelligence, Timchenko declined to elaborate, noting only that he could not divulge details for "understandable reasons," the report said.

The tycoon, who has both Russian and Finnish passports, said the threat of a plot by the U.S. had prompted him to avoid making trips to Europe lately because of the strong influence the U.S. has in the EU.

"Even the biggest private European banks are hostages to the world's financial system, which

is controlled by the U.S. If they want to, they can do anything they want with anyone they want," Timchenko was cited as saying.

The co-owner of gas producer Novatek and former co-owner of commodity trading company Gunvor, Timchenko was blacklisted by the U.S. in April over Russia's annexation of Crimea. In a note explaining the sanctions, the U.S. Treasury singled him out as a close ally of Putin.

The businessman, whose fortune Forbes estimates at $14.2 billion, shrugged off his inclusion on the blacklist, however, saying in mid-May that he saw the U.S. move as a political one.

"There are no legal grounds for sanctions against me, so clearly it is a fight against the Russian president. Well, I am ready to suffer for that cause," he said in comments to Reuters at the time.

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