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Russian Railways Head Yakunin to Resign, Become Senator

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Vladimir Yakunin

Vladimir Yakunin, the head of the Russian Railways state monopoly and an old friend of President Vladimir Putin, will leave his post to become a government senator, a company spokesman told Reuters on Monday.

Yakunin, who was sanctioned by the United States as a member of Putin's inner circle following Moscow's annexation of Crimea last year, will step down to become a senator for Russia's Kaliningrad exclave on the Baltic sea.

"Yakunin plans, after the conclusion of the elections, to join the Federation Council," said Russian Railways spokesman Grigory Levchenko. "The country's leadership made him this offer and he accepted."

The 67-year-old Yakunin has headed Russian Railways since 2005. He was nominated for the senator post by outgoing Kaliningrad Governor Nikolay Tsukanov, who filed for early retirement in June, prompting a by-election.

A Putin confident since their time together in St Petersburg in the 1990s, Yakunin is a vocal supporter of the president and has become a favoured target of Russian anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny.

After being sanctioned by the United States in March last year, Yakunin said his inclusion on the list was proof of his service to Putin and Russia.

"I am in good company. I cannot hide that I felt flattered. All the people on the list are notable people, people who did a lot for Russia," he wrote in a blog post.

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