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Former Russian Railways Head Yakunin Declines Senator's Seat

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State Duma deputy Yelena Mizulina and former head of the Russian Railways Vladimir Yakunin.

The former head of Russian Railways Vladimir Yakunin raised eyebrows once again Tuesday when he said he didn't want a seat in the upper chamber of the Russian parliament after all.

Just last month he elicited a media storm by unexpectedly quitting his lucrative job at the helm of the state rail monopoly and explaining it as prompted by the desire to become a senator in the Federation Council for the Kaliningrad region.

“I consulted with my friends, colleagues and the leadership ... and I would like to call on the re-elected governor of the Kaliningrad region [Nikolai Tsukanov] not to appoint me to represent the region in the Federation Council,” Yakunin was cited by the TASS news agency as saying Tuesday.

Yakunin, a longtime friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin, added that he would like to

focus on public and academic activities in the sphere of international affairs.

The railways boss was put forward as a candidate for the Federation Council in July by Tsukanov, who was running for re-election in Sunday's regional elections. Regional governors can delegate a senator to the upper chamber of parliament to represent their region.

Yakunin, who was accused by his detractors of making Russian Railways highly unprofitable, seemed confident of his backer's success: He left the state rail monopoly immediately after his nomination and was replaced by one of the company's senior managers, Oleg Belozerov.

Tsukanov won 70 percent of the vote in Sunday's election and promised to finalize the nomination of the Kaliningrad senator after his inauguration on Sept. 21. Apart from Yakunin, the shortlist of candidates includes the incumbent senator Oleg Tkach and head of the Kaliningrad administration Alexander Yaroshuk, but Yakunin was widely believed to be a shoo-in for the position.

His longtime critic, the anti-corruption crusader Alexei Navalny, suggested Yakunin's decision was motivated by his unwillingness to reveal his income, which he would have had to do as a senator and which he repeatedly refused to do as the head of a state company.

"Vladimir Yakunin is so reluctant to submit a declaration [of his income] that he turned down a seat in the Federation Council," Navalny wrote on Twitter on Tuesday.

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