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Soviet-born Putin Ally Becomes Israeli Defense Minister

By The Moscow Times

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Avigdor Liberman

Soviet-born politician Avigdor Lieberman has officially taken his post as Israeli Defense Minister, the Interfax news agency reported Tuesday. He is the first Russian-speaking Israeli to hold the role.

Lieberman previously served as Deputy Prime Minister from 2006 to 2008 and as Foreign Affairs Minister for Israel between 2009 and 2012, and again from 2013 to 2015. He currently leads conservative political party "Israel – Our Home," which is part of a coalition with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's party Likud.

Lieberman was born in Soviet Kishinev, the current capital of Moldova. He emigrated with his family to Israel in 1978 at the age of 20. In 1999, he founded his political party with the Israeli Russian-speaking community as its key electoral base. In a recent interview to Israel's Russian language newspaper Vesti, Lieberman said that his appointment to the post was a

breakthrough for the Russian-speaking community of Israel.

Lieberman is known to have a close relationship with Russia's President Vladimir Putin. Following the victory of Putin's United Russia party in the controversial 2011 Duma elections, Lieberman was one of the first public figures to call the voting “absolutely fair, free and democratic.”

Lieberman's critics accuse him of nationalist policies and of discriminating against Israel's Arab community. He has previously referred to Arab deputies in the Israeli parliament as a “fifth column,” and currently lives in the West Bank, considered occupied territory under international law.

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