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Imprisoned Russian Governor Belykh Says Arrest 'Not Political'

By The Moscow Times

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Nikita Belykh **Sergei Vedyashkin / Moskva News Agency**

Nikita Belykh, the independent Kirov region governor imprisoned on corruption charges, has spoken out against claims that his arrest was politically motivated, The New Times magazine reported Monday.

Belykh, who headed opposition party the Union of Right Forces seven years ago, claimed that nothing about his arrest would be different if he had stayed in opposition politics.

“I am not the opposition leader. I am a government official, the elected governor of the Kirov region,” he said. “It is not all about politics.”

Belykh still believes that he might yet keep his post and did not name any possible candidates to replace him, The New Times reported.

The governor was detained last month in Moscow restaurant on allegations of accepting a

400,000 euro ($444,000) bribe. The money was allegedly to protect the interests of two companies based in the Kirov region: the Novovyatsky ski factory and the Forestry Management Company.

Belykh pleaded not guilty, calling his arrest a setup. He began a hunger strike last week after not being permitting to see his wife or brother, his lawyer told journalists.

Belykh is the third Russian governor to be arrested on corruption charges over the last two years.

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