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Putin Fires Governor Detained on Corruption Charges

July 28, 2016



Nikita Belykh **Vedomosti**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has fired Nikita Belykh, the independent Kirov region governor imprisoned on corruption charges, due to a "lack of confidence."

Belykh was arrested last month on allegations of accepting a 400,000 euro ($440,000) bribe. He allegedly received the money to protect the interests of two companies based in the Kirov region: the Novovyatsky ski factory and the Forestry Management Company.

The politician pleaded not guilty in court. He has called his arrest "a set-up," but insists that it is not political.

Olga Mikhailova, Belykh's lawyer, said that his client understood the reasons for his dismissal but insisted on his innocence.

Mikhailova also said that Belykh had applied for permission to get married whilst in pre-trial detention, the Interfax news agency reported.

Belykh was leader of the Union of Right Forces opposition political party before being appointed as Kirov governor by former-president Dmitry Medvedev seven years ago.

Belykh is also closely linked to Russia's opposition, appointing activist Alexei Navalny as his advisor in 2009. Belykh defended Navalny in the KirovLes embezzlement case and first attracted the attention of the Russian security services whilst digging into Navalny's case, the Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported.

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