The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Pro-Kremlin Rapper Timati Joins Kadyrov in Opposing Wildberries Merger

July 29, 2024



Rapper and record producer Timati. **Sergei Savostyanov / TASS**

Rapper Timati has called for ending the merger of Russia's leading online retailer Wildberries with the outdoor advertising firm Russ Group.

Wildberries and Russ Group announced a merger last month to create a joint digital trading platform called RWB, which the Kremlin said received the personal approval of President Vladimir Putin. Reports surrounding the deal described it as part of Russia's wartime redistribution of corporate assets to Kremlin-linked business figures.

Timati, whose real name is Timur Yunusov, weighed in on the merger a week after Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov accused Russ Group of pursuing a "hostile takeover" of Wildberries.

"I'd like to address the third parties involved in this hostile takeover: dear friends, I urge you to come to your senses and return a wife to her family as soon as possible," Timati said in an Instagram story, referring to Wildberries founder Tatiana Bakalchuk.

Last week, Bakalchuk announced her divorce from Vladislav Bakalchuk, who she claimed was present during the RWB merger negotiations. She accused her husband of misleading the public by characterizing the deal as a corporate raid.

Related article: Wildberries Founder Announces Divorce as Husband Enlists Kadyrov to Fight 'Hostile Takeover'

Timati, seated next to Vladislav Bakalchuk in the Instagram video, said he "fully" supports the husband.

"I've been watching... how people broke into someone else's family and, under the guise of an affair and divorce proceedings, are simply trying to squeeze out a business and transfer assets," Timati said.

The rapper has publically detailed his friendship with Kadyrov, who is widely reported to benefit from the redistribution of corporate assets following the mass exodus of foreign companies after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Investigative media also reported that Kadyrov is the behind-the-scenes owner of Timati's stake in the rebranded Russian successor of the Starbucks coffee shop chain.

Tatiana Bakalchuk and Russ Group's Robert Mirzoyan had reportedly presented RWB to Putin as potentially "the world's largest ruble-based digital banking network and payment system" that would bypass SWIFT and rival giants like Amazon and Alphabet.

Business media called the RWB merger "very strange" since Wildberries is at least 20 times bigger than Russ Group.

Kadyrov accused the brothers Levan and Robert Mirzoyan, as well as "several well-known Caucasians," of committing large-scale fraud and vowed to oppose the deal "to the end."

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