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Exiled Businessman Chichvarkin Says He's Leaving Russia's Opposition, Citing Infighting

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Yevgeny Chichvarkin. **Social media**

Self-exiled entrepreneur Yevgeny Chichvarkin said Friday that he is temporarily stepping away from Russia's opposition, criticizing activists for "fighting each other" instead of uniting against the Kremlin.

"I've decided to withdraw from the Russian opposition for now, until my colleagues and friends refocus on fighting the bloody, monstrous, disgraceful Putin regime," Chichvarkin said in a video posted on his YouTube channel.

Chichvarkin, 50, co-founded the mobile phone retailer Yevroset in the late 1990s, growing it into a major brand. He fled to Britain in 2008, saying he feared for his life if jailed in Russia, where he faced extortion and kidnapping charges he claimed were politically motivated.

Those charges were dropped in 2011.

Related article: Maxim Katz Wants to Unite Russia's Splintered Opposition. That May Be Easier Said Than Done.

Chichvarkin's announcement on Friday comes amid an ongoing dispute between prominent opposition blogger Maxim Katz and Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) — the latest scandal to rock Russia's fragmented political opposition.

Last month, Katz released a report accusing FBK of "whitewashing" the reputations of fugitive bankers Alexander Zheleznyak and Sergei Leontiev. FBK responded by calling Katz's report "lies, manipulations and blatant omissions of inconvenient documents."

Chichvarkin said he does not believe there are any figures in the opposition who "reflect the spirit, aspirations, or desires of the Russian people," which he said "can only be understood by those who have stayed in Russia."

In what appeared to be a tongue-in-cheek endorsement, Chichvarkin named businessman and Instagram influencer Nikolai Vasilenko as a potential unifying figure. Vasilenko, 55, gained popularity this fall for posting positive affirmations while sporting a well-groomed beard and luxury designer brands.

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