

Governor Out After Worm Scandal

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Tver Governor Dmitry Zelenin, who angered the Kremlin last fall for complaining online about finding a worm in his salad at a presidential reception, lost his post Thursday.

A brief statement on the Kremlin's web site [said](#) Zelenin had resigned voluntarily and would be replaced by his deputy Andrei Shevelyov, 40, a former paratrooper who fought in Chechnya.

Neither the Kremlin nor Zelenin elaborated on what prompted the millionaire governor to step down. Analysts said he was likely forced to resign over a series of policy failures in the region — although the worm scandal had contributed to his departure.

The 48-year-old former Norilsk Nickel CEO, a member of United Russia, had governed his native region since 2003. But public discontent grew with his policies, allowing the Communists to gain a majority in the Tver city legislature in 2009.

"When you have the Communists winning elections and defeating United Russia,

the governor is the one who bears responsibility," regional analyst Alexander Kynev said by telephone Thursday.

Zelenin attracted several foreign companies, including Japanese machinery maker Hitachi, to the region, but many locals travel to Moscow to work even though the daily commute can take four hours.

Local Communist lawmaker Lyudmila Vorobyova said corruption has also grown because of frequent staff shuffles in the regional administration.

"His governance was a failure. He was concerned more about his business interests than regional development," Vorobyova said by telephone.

Senior United Russia official Sergei Neverov called Zelenin's exit "logical" because Tver is among the country's "most problem-ridden regions," mainly due to social development issues, Interfax reported.

Calls for Zelenin's removal were first voiced by Kremlin officials in October, when he posted online a picture of the worm that he found on his plate during a dinner in the Kremlin. Senior presidential aide Sergei Prikhodko said at the time that Zelenin should go over his "imbecility."

But President Dmitry Medvedev made light of the incident, suggesting that Zelenin "kill a worm" — a Russian expression meaning "grab a bite" — on his birthday in November.

A Twitter [account](#) for the worm was set up soon after the scandal, offering satirical political commentary from the creature's point of view. A message tweeted on the account Thursday called for the governorship to be handed to the worm. Analysts said, however, that Tver regional lawmakers were likely to confirm Medvedev's choice of Shevelyov.

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