

Prosecutor Gets Upper Hand

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The Prosecutor General's Office has gotten a boost from President Dmitry Medvedev with a bill proposing to increase its power amid an ongoing turf war with the Investigative Committee.

The draft of the legislation would return power to the Prosecutor General's Office to conduct its own investigations and to investigate crimes committed by judges and investigators, Kommersant reported Wednesday, citing sources.

The bill would return to Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika powers he lost in 2011, when the Investigative Committee was formed.

Both agencies have since been engaged in an ugly and long turf war for influence, a battle which reached its climax with the arrest last February of several of Chaika's senior regional prosecutors in connection with illegal casino activities.

In April, the Investigative Committee said a secret witness in the case testified that Chaika's

son, Igor, had acted as a middleman between prosecutors and illegal casino owners. While Igor Chaika was called as a witness, no charges were brought against him.

Yury Chaika has long argued that investigative powers should be returned to him so he can open his own probes into violations he uncovers.

"If a prosecutor conducts a probe and finds a violation of the law, he has a right to open a case. And then, together with the investigator, he can bring it to the court," Chaika said.

The draft of the bill will also include the possibility for prosecutors to appeal to the courts to demand increased jail time for criminals and the right to seize property, Kommersant reported.

If the draft is passed, the prosecutor general will become more powerful than the Investigative Committee, which will lose its independence — a position long-favored by Medvedev.

Gennady Gudkov, deputy head of the Duma's security committee told The Moscow Times that he partly agreed with Chaika, saying his office should be allowed control over its own investigations.

"Of course, it is a strange thing when investigators are investigating each other, but it is difficult to expect objectivity from today's prosecutors," he said.

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