

Newsmaker: Small Business Lobbyist Titov Named Ombudsman

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The  **Moscow Times**

Liberal entrepreneur Boris Titov, head of the Delovaya Rossiya small-business lobbying group, will bring respect and experience to his new role as business ombudsman, analysts and fellow businessmen said.

Deputy head of Delovaya Rossia Nikolai Ostarkov called Titov the “perfect candidate for the job.”

“He was never a bureaucrat-type person, and he would be a respected authority for business,” Ostarkov said.

Titov told reporters on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg forum, where his appointment was announced by President Vladimir Putin on Thursday, that he would appeal to prosecutors to reconsider the cases of businessmen believed to be illegally jailed.

According to Titov's estimates, there are about 14,000 businesspeople currently serving sentences for various economic crimes that could be punished by fines instead.

Titov, 51, a graduate of the prestigious Moscow Institute of International Relations, was involved in the chemical production business.

Titov also owns the Abrau-Durso wine factory, which produces the well-known Russian champagne of the same name in the Krasnodar region in southern Russia.

The company, which listed its shares on the Russian stock exchange in April, has reported \$99 million turnover.

Titov's celebrity friends Yevgeny Morgulis, a musician, and liberal-leaning journalist Leonid Parfyonov hold symbolic stakes in the company to popularize the brand.

Titov, who once occupied a top position in the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, became the head of Delovaya Rossia in 2003.

He was also a senior member of the Kremlin-leaning Right Cause party before it was briefly chaired by billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov.

Known to be an economic liberal, Titov was also a harsh critic of former finance minister Alexei Kudrin, accusing him of not spending enough money on infrastructure projects.

Titov recently established the Right Turn movement, aimed at uniting political figures and the business elite to address the challenge of the country's political and business climate.

"There are a lot of people in various parties and state services who share liberal values," Titov said in a recent meeting with reporters that included The Moscow Times.

Among the proposals he has made is an amnesty for bureaucrats accused of enriching themselves illegally. But Titov said that those granted amnesty should pay the 13 percent flat income tax and "leave office forever."

Titov, who avoided discussing politics directly with reporters during the breakfast in Moscow last week, said he believes that protests in the country might grow if the government doesn't carry out serious economic and political reforms.

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