

Ex-Governor Belykh Released From Russian Prison After Serving 8-Year Sentence

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Nikita Belykh. **Mariya Shevchenko / TASS**

The former governor of central Russia's Kirov region, Nikita Belykh, who was sentenced to eight years in jail in 2018 for accepting a large bribe, was released from prison on Friday after serving his sentence in full, his lawyer [told](#) state media.

“Today, in connection with the terms of the sentence of the Presnensky District Court from 2018, Nikita Yuryevich was released to pre-trial detention center-1 in the city of Kirov,” Belykh’s lawyer, Andrei Grokhotov, was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency. “The sentence has expired. He is now free.”

In a letter written by the former governor that Grokhotov later provided to journalists, Belykh [said](#) his “health and well-being are fine,” adding that he plans to spend time with his family and children.

“Also, the Kirov Regional Court continues proceedings in my case, in which I must take part,” he said, referring to a separate abuse of power charge brought against him in 2021.

Belykh said he would need time before he was ready to speak directly to the press or give any interviews.

“A lot has changed in our country over 8 years, and the information I received was limited, so I need to learn, understand and talk with people a lot,” he wrote in the letter.

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Belykh, who once led the liberal Union of Right Forces party in the early 2000s, was [arrested](#) in 2016 while accepting a bribe of 400,000 euros (\$427,396) at a restaurant in Moscow. President Vladimir Putin later dismissed him as Kirov region Governor — a post he had held since former president Dmitry Medvedev appointed him in 2008.

Unlike most governors in Russia, Belykh never joined the ruling United Russia party. At the same time, while serving as the head of the Kirov region, he appointed the late opposition activist Alexei Navalny as his advisor, which some observers believe played a key role in the criminal case against Belykh.

In 2018, a Moscow court [sentenced](#) Belykh to eight years in a maximum security prison for accepting bribes between 2012 and 2016 to protect the interests of timber projects in the Kirov region. He denied the charges against him and claimed he was the victim of a setup.

The two years the ex-governor spent in pre-trial detention counted toward his overall prison sentence.

In 2021, Belykh was charged with two counts of abuse of power. He was acquitted of one charge but a court in December found him guilty of the second and sentenced to two and a half years in prison.

The former governor's defense lawyer [launched an appeal](#) against that conviction, according to the business daily Kommersant, and a court is scheduled to make a ruling on June 28.

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