

Surkov Says He Has No Vendetta Against Prokhorov

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Two months after billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov blamed Kremlin spinmaster Vladislav Surkov for his ouster from the Right Cause party and called for his dismissal, Surkov shrugged off the notion of a vendetta.

Surkov, the Kremlin's first deputy chief of staff, told Moskovsky Komsomolets in a rare interview published Friday that he has a good relationship with Prokhorov and praised the businessman as a talented leader.

"A fair number of talented, bright people want me fired," Surkov was quoted as saying. "It's normal, and it doesn't diminish their merit. It also doesn't stop me from maintaining good relations with them."

Surkov, who also praised Prokhorov as "strong, bright and even unusually talented," conceded that he didn't know whether the good relationship was mutual.

"I have a good relationship him. What he has with me, I don't know," he said.

Prokhorov was elected head of the pro-business Right Cause in June, only to lose the spot in a party coup in mid-September. He accused the Kremlin of turning Right Cause into a puppet party, and analysts said Prokhorov had proved too independent for the Kremlin's taste.

At a snap news conference after his resignation, Prokhorov accused Surkov — the Kremlin's powerful point man for domestic politics — of being a puppet master who had misinformed the country's leaders, suppressed the media and spread discord.

"He needs to be fired. Only then we can have real politics," Prokhorov said, adding that he would seek a meeting with President Dmitry Medvedev to press the matter forward.

Surkov is a widely acknowledged power broker and the ideological architect of Vladimir Putin's regime, but he is rarely, if ever, called out in public. Prokhorov's decision to break this taboo sparked speculation that he had fallen out with the Kremlin and might share the fate of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, once Russia's richest man, who has been in prison since 2003 on charges many believe are punishment for his political ambitions.

Deprived of Prokhorov's name recognition, organizational gusto and financial backing, it seems unlikely that Right Cause will pass the 7 percent threshold in State Duma elections on Dec. 4.

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