

Luzhkov Denies Deals With Authorities

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Luzhkov, seen behind the steering wheel during his tenure as mayor. He is facing questioning in a criminal case. **Igor Tabakov**

Ousted Mayor Yuri Luzhkov said he made no "agreements" with Russian authorities before appearing for questioning last week in a criminal case involving his billionaire wife.

"In our democratic country, anything can happen," Luzhkov said in a phone interview with the private Dozhd television channel in Moscow, excerpts of which were posted on its web site before the broadcast of the full version on Monday.

"I didn't make any agreements with anyone about any kind of guarantees" that would grant him immunity from prosecution, Luzhkov said from London, according to Dozhd.

Luzhkov returned to Russia from abroad to appear last week as a witness in a case involving City Hall's purchase of a stake in Bank of Moscow in 2009 for about 15 billion rubles (\$483 million). The bank then fraudulently lent almost 13 billion rubles to property company ZAO Premier Estate, funds that ended up in a bank account controlled by Luzhkov's wife, Yelena Baturina, according to investigators.

The former mayor, fired last year after almost two decades in power, and his wife have denied wrongdoing. Baturina, who became Russia's richest woman during her husband's stewardship of Europe's largest city, has ignored repeated summons to testify as a witness, saying she was outside Russia, the Interior Ministry said in a statement late last month.

Investigators are ready to involve Interpol and turn for legal assistance to relevant agencies in Britain and Austria if Baturina fails to appear, the ministry said.

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