

Duma Deputy Goes Missing

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Ashot Yeghizaryan **Maxim Stulov**

State Duma Deputy Ashot Yeghizaryan has disappeared without trace, the leader of his party's parliamentary faction said Wednesday, fueling speculation that the Liberal Democrat lawmaker might have fled the country.

Igor Lebedev, head of the Liberal Democrats' Duma faction, said he and his colleagues had no idea about Yeghizaryan's whereabouts.

"We have no contact — calls to all his telephones are redirected to his [Duma] office," Lebedev said, Interfax reported.

Yeghizaryan, who has been a Duma deputy since 2000, left the country in early summer and has not appeared at parliamentary hearings since the summer recess ended last month, the Tvoi Den tabloid [reported](#) Wednesday.

The report added, citing unidentified Duma officials, that Yeghizaryan might not return to

Russia at risk of losing his parliamentary immunity and might face criminal charges.

Asked whether he believed that Yegiazaryan might not come back, Lebedev said that "so far this is speculation and rumors."

If he decides to remain abroad, it would be the first time in years that a sitting Duma deputy had fled the country.

Staff in Yegiazaryan's Duma office on Wednesday refused to provide information about the deputy's whereabouts. An aide who declined to give her name promised that a call from The Moscow Times would be returned "if Ashot Gevorgovich [Yegiazaryan] decides to do so."

Yegiazaryan's absence comes amid a flurry of media reports suggesting that the deputy was pursuing personal shadowy business interests rather than his Duma duties and concealing his wealth. One report even claimed that he had obtained a U.S. residency permit, which would be illegal for Russian lawmakers.

Yegiazaryan, who is a member of the Duma's Budget and Taxes Committee, is believed to control a key stake in Hotel Moskva, a prime chunk of real estate under construction next to the Kremlin.

He has denied any direct ownership or being engaged in business activities that would lead to a conflict of interests with his parliamentary activities. Instead, he said, he was overseeing construction as a deputy representing Moscow.

But according to court documents published last month, Yegiazaryan claims that billionaire Suleiman Kerimov forced him to relinquish a 25.5 percent stake in Hotel Moskva.

The deputy filed a request for \$2 billion in damages at the London Court of International Arbitration on Sept. 13, according to court documents in Cyprus.

Three days later, Yegiazaryan won a court order in Cyprus that froze assets worth \$6 billion, much of them belonging to Kerimov.

His official declaration of income and wealth on the Duma's [web site](#) does not mention assets clearly linked to the hotel.

The hotel stake ended up in Kerimov's hands after Deutsche Bank in late 2008 demanded repayment of a \$87.5 million loan and City Hall transferred the money by taking assets from Yegiazaryan's company Dekorum, national media reported in January.

Dekorum together with City Hall owns DekMos, the developer engaged in building the hotel.

Yegiazaryan's case in Cyprus is also directed against former Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and his wife, Yelena Baturina, who owns Moscow developer Inteko, Vedomosti reported last month.

Analysts have linked the lawsuit to political pressure on Luzhkov, who was fired last week. Law enforcement agencies have said they do not plan to check corruption allegations against him and Baturina.

Yegiazaryan also owns a villa in Nice, France, and a house outside Los Angeles, Tvoi Den [reported](#) last month. The tabloid reprinted a scan from a U.S. real estate register showing that Yegiazaryan had bought a \$355,000 house in the outskirts of Los Angeles.

In his 2009 income declaration published on the Duma web site, Yegiazaryan claimed a standard deputy's annual salary of 1.9 million rubles (\$63,700) plus 9.1 million rubles (\$305,000) for his wife. The declaration mentions no real estate abroad.

(Together with their four children, the couple also owns two large plots of land, nine apartments and four cars, including a Mercedes and a Porsche Cayenne.)

The Tvoi Den report also suggested that he had a Green Card and a U.S. social security number, implying that he had residency status.

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