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Mironov Stripped of Perks, Vows to Fight

By Alexandra Odynova

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Ousted Federation Council Speaker Sergei Mironov promoted his party as the sole opposition force in the country Thursday, but stopped short of criticizing the Kremlin, which had explicitly approved his removal.

But he hinted at a willingness to go against the ruling tandem, saying his Just Russia party would not endorse any presidential candidate by the pro-Kremlin United Russia party, which is widely expected to back the member of the duo who runs in the 2012 vote.

Mironov had reason to be disgruntled because his Wednesday ouster, masterminded by United Russia, will cost him state-provided perks such as an apartment, a dacha, a jet and personal security guards — not to mention the damage to A Just Russia's reputation.

He will even lose the storage space for an extensive collection of rock samples that he gathered during his years as a geologist in the 1970s and 1980s. The collection, now stored in his speaker's office, will be handed over to Moscow's Vernadsky Geology Museum, Interfax said.

Mironov said the loss of perks did not bother him. "I have used a regular car to travel around Moscow for my personal needs before and have done my own shopping," he said, RIA-Novosti reported. "I never gave myself airs."

But Mironov focused more on his party's future, not personal issues, during a news conference Thursday. He confirmed that A Just Russia would harden its oppositional stance.

"We're the only real threat to the ruling party," he said, according to a transcript on A Just Russia's web site. The other two parliamentary factions, the Communists and the Liberal Democrats, are just "backup dancers" for United Russia, Mironov said.

The Communists and Liberal Democrats supported Mironov's ouster from the Federation Council during a Wednesday vote in the St. Petersburg legislature, which had nominated him for the upper chamber in 2001. The vote was proposed by United Russia and implicitly endorsed by President Dmitry Medvedev, who said Wednesday that Mironov's sacking would be "nothing supernatural."

Mironov, who turned over nominal party leadership to Nikolai Levichev just weeks ago, said Thursday that he had expected the ouster for months because of a mounting struggle with United Russia, RIA-Novosti reported.

He confirmed that he would take up a seat in the Duma, where seven members of his faction have already offered to give up their mandates to him, Interfax said.

The head of United Russia's Duma faction, Speaker Boris Gryzlov, said he would welcome Mironov, with whom he "has good personal relations," to the lower chamber, the report said.

But Mironov found no kind words for United Russia, saying the St. Petersburg vote showed the party's "agony." He promised to personally lead A Just Russia into the Duma elections in December.

Mironov also reiterated an earlier promise that A Just Russia would not endorse United Russia's candidate for the presidential race, even if it were President Dmitry Medvedev or Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

He said, though, that he held no grudge against Medvedev and Putin for not preventing his ouster. "A grudge is not what you should follow in politics," Mironov said.

In an indication of A Just Russia's drift toward the opposition, police detained a dozen party members protesting Mironov's sacking in one-man pickets in downtown Moscow. Such arrests are generally reserved for anti-establishment political groups.

Meanwhile, United Russia said the next Federation Council speaker would be selected from among seven candidates after a consultation with Putin.

The party did not identify its nominees. Earlier, Mironov's former deputies Alexander Torshin and Svetlana Orlova were tipped as potential successors.

Emergency Situations Minister Sergei Shoigu is also a candidate, Kommersant reported Thursday, citing unspecified United Russia insiders. Shoigu has not commented on the issue.

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