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AvtoVAZ Chief Backs Putin Return

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TOLYATTI — AvtoVAZ chief Igor Komarov said he believed that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin should return to the presidency in 2012.

Komarov was asked by guests at a dinner near the company's plant in Tolyatti whom he favored as the next president.

"If you evaluate who has helped us in our hardest time, the answer is obvious ... Mr. Putin," he said Wednesday.

"He played the principle role. It was his risk, his decision. He said we need to rescue AvtoVAZ," he said.

AvtoVAZ, the country's largest carmaker, was on the verge of collapse in 2009 before the government agreed to a billion-dollar bailout to protect jobs and the company.

Neither Putin nor President Dmitry Medvedev has said who will run in next year's election.

The 45-year-old AvtoVAZ sold a 25 percent stake to French carmaker Renault in 2008.

Renault is now in talks with the Russian government, via the state's industrial conglomerate and AvtoVAZ shareholder Russian Technologies, about taking on a controlling share.

AvtoVAZ employs about 70,000 staff, having cut nearly a third of its work force during the financial crisis. Its 600-hectare plant is the largest in Europe.

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