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Dvorkovich Denies Resignation Rumors

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Arkady Dvorkovich

Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich got in the spotlight Tuesday amid rumors that he might have to resign in the wake of the recent scandals in the energy sector, which he oversees.

In comments posted on his Facebook account late Monday, Dvorkovich unequivocally dismissed speculation in social networks that he is leaving his post as a result of the situation around hydropower producer RusHydro and the presumed business interests of Akhmed Bilalov, former chairman of North Caucasus Resorts' board of directors.

A Facebook user asked the minister whether the information about his resignation circulated by the media is true.

"Of course not," Dvorkovich commented. He added that the information is "fake," answering a follow-up question.

The rumors were provoked by the tweets that appeared on his behalf on a fake Twitter account Monday.

"The scandal with Bilalov has borne its fruit. I think it's impossible to remain in office in this situation," the user of the @advorkovlch account tweeted. "The main reason is RusHydro and North Caucasus Resorts. There's the risk of a criminal case," he elaborated.

The tweets referred to presumed financial violations discovered by investigators at the state-owned hydropower producer and the situation around the state corporation overseeing the development of the North Caucasus, whose chairman Bilalov had been criticized by President Vladimir Putin earlier this month for failing to meet Olympic construction deadlines in Sochi.

Dvorkovich came under fire by the three state-controlled federal channels — Channel One, Rossia-1 and NTV — that broadcast similar reports Sunday, saying Dvorkovich had approved the sale of North Caucasus power transmission grids to Eurasia Energy Holdings, a company allegedly affiliated with Bilalov.

Dvorkovich ordered the Economic Development Ministry and the Energy Ministry to consider hiring Eurasia Energy Holdings to manage the grids and subsequently selling them to it, NTV reported. The move followed a letter by the company's representatives to Dvorkovich, the report said.

The rumors about Dvorkovich's resignation are "ridiculous," since there's no reasons for that, his spokeswoman Aliya Samigullina told the Dozhd television channel Tuesday.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's spokeswoman, Natalya Timakova, echoed the thought, saying Dvorkovich would "work for a long time and with pleasure."

He ordered the ministries to consider the issue of the North Caucasian grids, but this was part of the daily routine of a government official, Samigullina said earlier this week.

Such resolutions "are placed on 90 percent of the documents that come through the Cabinet," she said in comments carried by Moskovsky Komsomolets. She also said she was surprised about how television channels could obtain an internal Cabinet document.

The media reports are likely to be an indication of the intensifying struggle for the prime minister's chair, since they attacked Dvorkovich, one of Medvedev's closest allies, said Yury Korgunyuk, a political analyst at the INDEM foundation. But the prime minister himself is likely to be the real target, he added.

Rumors about the upcoming dismissal of Medvedev's Cabinet have recently intensified, which might result in some ministers being attacked through state-controlled mass media in the near future, Vedomosti reported Tuesday, citing an unidentified official close to the presidential administration.

The report indicated Medvedev's waning influence and cited another official as saying that his controversial statement that he might run for president in 2018 kicked off the fight for the prime minister's chair among political elite.

In an interview with Le Figaro in November, Medvedev said he did not rule out returning to the Kremlin in the future. Referring to a well-known Russian proverb, Medvedev said the Kremlin is "the river in which one can step twice."

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