

Surkov Says Kremlin Defeated the Opposition

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Vladislav Surkov speaking at an event in 2010.

Deputy Prime Minister Vladislav Surkov told students in London that the political system that he helped create had beat the opposition and suggested that he had been one Russia's top businessmen when he worked for jailed tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Surkov also insisted that Russia was open for foreign investment and expressed longing for stagnation to throttle back the booming economy.

The presentation to a group of mostly Russian students at the London School of Economics offered a rare insight into the thinking of the former Kremlin gray cardinal credited with authoring the concept of "sovereign democracy" for Russia.

Surkov arrived about 10 minutes late on Wednesday — just as the students had started to compare his punctuality with that of President Vladimir Putin, who is well known for being

late — and immediately declared that he would speak in Russian, news reports said.

"I will speak in Russian, and I do not apologize for it because I'm Russian," he said, according to the BBC Russian Service. "My English is not good enough."

The hall with 150 seats was about two-thirds filled, an unusual sight at a university where demand for guest lectures is usually much higher than the capacity, the [report said](#).

Outside, a handful of protesters greeted Surkov with a papier-mâché puppet with his likeness and the demand that he be placed on the Magnitsky blacklist.

The former
Kremlin gray
cardinal offers a
rare glimpse
into his
thinking in a
speech to
students at a
London
university.

Surkov, whose lecture was titled "Innovation in Russia: Plans and Prospects," skipped his prepared remarks and went right to the question-and-answer phase of the session, saying he was ready to answer anything.

The first question dealt with an ongoing investigation into accusations that Skolkovo vice president Alexei Beltyukov embezzled \$750,000 and gave the money to opposition-minded State Duma Deputy Ilya Ponomaryov.

Surkov noted that Skolkovo president Viktor Vekselberg is one of the richest people in Russia, with a fortune of \$15.1 billion, according to Forbes magazine, and said he would not ruin his reputation for a few hundred thousand dollars.

"He has already earned enough and is already old enough to think about his legacy and what will be written about him afterward," he said.

After a pause, Surkov added: "I am in the same position. I am not the poorest person after working in the business world for 10 years and I will, if necessary, work there again. I was successful in business before I joined the presidential administration. I was one of the most successful in my field."

Surkov spearheaded advertising and public relations for Khodorkovsky from 1991 to 1996 and is believed by some to have played a role in the tycoon's arrest on politically tainted charges amid a dispute with President Vladimir Putin in 2002. Surkov also worked for Rosprom, Alfa Bank and Channel One television before Putin brought him to the Kremlin in 2004.

About the Skolkovo scandal, Surkov said the allegations had not been proven and the matter should be left to the courts to decide.

But, he added, corruption exists around the world and should not be allowed to stop a business. "If a pig spoils your reputation, that doesn't mean all of your work goes back to square one," he said. "You just need to get rid of the pig and press ahead."

Asked about Russia's political system, Surkov said he was proud to be part of it and declared it had survived the disputed State Duma elections in 2011 that prompted mass anti-Kremlin protests.

"Do you really think that the old system collapsed after the protests in December 2011? No, it beat the opposition. That's a fact," he said, according to [RIA-Novosti](#).

But he acknowledged that the system should not be rigid.

"You have to adapt to changing conditions," he said. "The system must change."

As a possible change, he said he would like to see the formation of a second major political party to challenge United Russia's monopoly on power. Kremlin officials earlier have made similar remarks.

Turning to the investment climate, which is part of Surkov's brief as deputy prime minister for economic modernization, he touted the need for foreign investment while saying that Russia, like any country, should prohibit foreign involvement in strategic sectors such as a company that developed vaccinations.

He also said economic stagnation was not a problem and he would actually welcome it because it would give government officials like him a chance to relax.

"For some reason we are unable to see stagnation," he said. "I'd be glad to see it, but it's not coming. ... It's a shame that there is no stagnation and no time to rest."

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