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Dvorkovich Sees Possibility of Guriev Return

By Alexander Bratersky

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Sergei Guriev **Maxim Shemetov**

Self-exiled economist Sergei Guriev met with the Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich on Wednesday in Paris — his first informal get together with a senior Russian official since he left the country last month, fearing pressure from law enforcement agencies.

Guriev, who headed the liberal New Economic School until his departure to France, told The Moscow Times that he met Dvorkovich for breakfast Wednesday morning, and the two discussed "the affairs of life and the future of the New Economic School."

"It was a chat between old friends," Guriev said in a phone interview from Paris. He did not elaborate on the nature of the conversation.

Some see the

meeting of the deputy prime minister and the economist, who chatted like "old friends" as a sign of government support.

The Deputy Prime Minister — a key ally of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev — and Guriev are well acquainted, since Dvorkovich sits on the New Economic School's board of directors and received his master's degree from that institution.

Dvorkovich told Kommersant on Wednesday that Guriev was not "closing the door" on coming back to Russia. "Of course, he is considering returning soon. If the reasons [for his departure] that he talked about fade away, it will be possible for him to return," Dvorkovich said.

Sources close to Guriev said he feared for his safety due to pressure from the Investigative Committee, which summoned him for questioning several times regarding his involvement in a report made during the second case against jailed Yukos founder Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Guriev and several other experts working on behalf of the Kremlin's Council on Human rights made the report, based on a request from Medvedev, who was president at the time.

The expert opinion offered by Guriev concluded that Khodorkovsky was wrongly accused of tax avoidance.

According to investigators, the authors of the report had a conflict of interest because Khodorkovsky had paid them for producing the report.

Guriev has denied receiving money from the former tycoon.

'It looked like [the observer] was very interested in our conversation.'
Sergei Guriev
Self-exiled economist

While the meeting with Dvorkovich can be seen as a demonstration of political support for the economist — whom Medvedev had praised in the past for his work — Guriev said he was not planning to return to Russia in the near future.

"I will remain on an academic sabbatical for a year; it is a normal thing for a professor," said Guriev, adding that he would take a teaching position in Science Po, the respected Paris institute for political studies. His wife Yekaterina Zhuravskaya lives in France, where she

teaches at the Paris School of Economics.

Guriev said his departure was not an emigration. “While I am very grateful for the support I got, there is no need to regard me as a political refugee, since I am not one,” he said.

But Guriev said that even during his meeting with Dvorkovich he spotted a man in the café who was eavesdropping on their discussion. “It looked like he was very interested in our conversation,” he said.

Although President Vladimir Putin, when asked about Guriev, said the economist had “nothing to fear” if he decided to come back, a source close to Guriev said he did not see it as a guarantee of a safe return. “Khodorkovsky’s case is open and no one is going to close it down,” a source said.

Guriev said he carefully read between the lines of Kremlin-influenced pundits, one of whom, Sergei Markov — a vice president of Plekhanov University of Economics — had earlier accused Guriev of being the gray cardinal of the anti-Putin members of Prime Minister Medvedev’s team.

The economist added that he believed Markov was familiar with inside information from the investigators and was serving as an informal conduit of communication from law enforcement officials. “I am very grateful to him for those messages. It looks like he has telepathic contact with them, so from his interviews I can see what they think” Guriev said.

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