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Officials Say Uralkali Arrest Won't Affect Agreements

By The Moscow Times

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Russian government officials made it clear Wednesday that the scandal around detention of potash maker Uralkali's chief executive Vladislav Baumgertner would not have a negative impact on existing agreements between Moscow and Minsk.

The arrest of Baumgertner would not affect the decision by the Eurasian Economic Community's bailout fund to provide the final tranche of the $3 billion loan to Belarus, Deputy Finance Minister Sergei Storchak told journalists.

"In the long run, the bailout fund and Belarus have mutual obligations," Storchak said, Interfax reported. He pointed out that the obligations of Russia and Kazakhstan to the fund have "nothing to do with arrests."

"We must fulfill our obligations," he said.

Moscow and Astana are the major contributors to the bailout fund, which was created by Eurasian Economic Community member-countries. The bloc is slated to decide on the final $440 million portion of the loan to Minsk in November.

Russia also has no intention to give up its military cooperation with its neighbor, Russia's military and air attachO in Minsk, said Maxim Kazantsev, told RIA Novosti.

"Cooperation will continue on the same level," he said.

Meanwhile, Perm governor Viktor Basargin called for the Russian government to enhance efforts to defend Baumgertner. The claim was voiced in a telegram to Foreign Minster Sergei Lavrov, Basargin said in a LiveJournal post Wednesday.

The governor warned that the businessman's detention could "destabilize the work of Uralkali," whose manufacturing facilities are located in the Perm region.

The head of the potash giant was detained in Minsk earlier this week, with Belarus authorities accusing him of abusing his position and official power.

The move was contested by three Russian and two Belarus defense lawyers representing Baumgertner, Interfax reported Wednesday, citing Vladimir Marchukov, adviser or the Russian ambassador in Minsk. The lawyers filed a claim with a Belarussian court that would be considered next week, Marchukov said.

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