

Moscow Foresees Handover of Baumgertner Soon

By [The Moscow Times](#)

September 22, 2013



Waste heaped at state-owned giant Belaruskali's potash mines near the town of Soligorsk south of Minsk. **Vasily Fedosenko**

Russia expects Belarus soon to hand over the head of Russian potash producer Uralkali, arrested last month in the Belarussian capital, a Kremlin official said Friday.

The remarks by foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov suggested the two countries were closer to resolving a dispute that flared after Uralkali quit a sales partnership that had been one of the dominant forces on the global potash market.

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko, who will meet President Vladimir Putin on Monday, said Thursday that he was ready to repatriate Uralkali CEO Vladislav Baumgertner but wanted a change of ownership in Uralkali that restored strong commercial links with Belarus.

"We expect that this Russian citizen will be handed over to Russia," Ushakov told reporters. "Yesterday's comments by the Belarussian president give us reason to hope that this question will be resolved in the nearest future."

Lukashenko took a conciliatory tack after weeks of tension following the collapse in July of the lucrative sales cartel involving Uralkali, the world's top potash producer, and state-owned Belaruskali.

He said he did not want the dispute to become a major stumbling block in political ties with Russia.

Exports of potash, a major fertilizer ingredient, account for 12 percent of Belarussia's state revenue. The pullout by Uralkali threatened to push potash prices down 25 percent — a big blow to the former Soviet republic's fragile economy.

Belarus has accused the 41-year-old Baumgartner of abuse of power and has twice turned down appeals for him to be released provisionally pending investigation.

With the affair placing fresh strain on the close, but often tense, relations between the two ex-Soviet allies, speculation has mounted that billionaire Suleiman Kerimov, Uralkali's main shareholder, may sell his \$3.7 billion stake to an owner looked on more favorably by the Kremlin.

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