

Surkov Makes Kremlin Comeback

September 22, 2013



Vladislav Surkov (center) with former presidential aide Arkady Dvorkovich (left) and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev (right) during a Feb. 2011 meeting of the Council for Economic Modernization and Innovative Development.

Former Deputy Prime Minister Vladislav Surkov will be returning to the Kremlin after an almost two-year break to serve as an aide to President Vladimir Putin.

The Kremlin website confirmed the news late Friday.

Surkov, once known as the Kremlin's "gray cardinal" and who served as Deputy Prime Minister for 16 months before resigning in May, will be responsible for Russia's relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told radio RSN, Interfax reported.

Some sources said he could also oversee relations with Georgia and Ukraine.

The position was vacated after Putin dismissed Tatyana Golikova on Friday to appoint her as head of the Audit Chamber.

Surkov, who turned 49 on Saturday and holds a master's degree in economics, shifted to politics from business in 1999, when he joined the presidential administration as an aide to the chief of staff and later became deputy chief of staff. In 2011, he was appointed deputy prime minister.

Surkov was formerly responsible for domestic policy, and he is known for coining the phrase "sovereign democracy" to describe Russia's current political system. He is also believed to have created the once high-profile pro-Kremlin youth group Nashi.

His resignation in May triggered widespread speculation that he was forced to resign after publicly rejecting Putin's criticism of the Cabinet. Others pointed to an ongoing conflict with the Investigative Committee over alleged corruption at Skolkovo as the reason for his departure.

But his return to the Kremlin on Friday showed that he has remained a "member of Putin's team" and that the president does not want to waste Surkov's experience and creativity, political analysts told Interfax.

Back in the 1990s, Surkov worked closely with jailed former Yukos owner Mikhail Khodorkovsky and his jailed business partner Platon Lebedev at Menatep bank. Surkov was rumored to have played a role in their 2005 conviction of fraud, embezzlement and tax evasion in a case that is seen by many as Putin's punishment of Khodorkovsky for his political ambitions.

In 1998, Surkov served as first deputy director general of the state television channel ORT.

Surkov has boasted to be a relative of Dzhokhar Dudayev, the late leader of the breakaway Chechen republic of Ichkeria in the 1990s. He also counts as a friend Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, who congratulated him on his appointment on Saturday and said there was no better man for the job.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/09/22/surkov-makes-kremlin-comeback-a27890>