

Owner of Yanukovich's Palatial Estate Slams 'Dirty Propaganda'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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People peering into the presidential retreat in Mezhyhirya outside Kiev.

A politician whose company owned the luxury country residence of the ousted president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, said in an interview Thursday that he is ready to support the country's new government.

Sergei Klyuev, a businessman and member of parliament, vowed to return home soon to fight allegations that he and other members of the country's political elite — described by their opponents as "The Family" — had enriched themselves at public expense, for example by rigging state contracts and privatizations.

Klyuev said he and his brother were victims of "dirty propaganda" by political enemies that he would not name. His comments marked the first public statement by someone alleged to be close to Yanukovich since he disappeared late last month.

"I wish success to the new government. If there is anything we can do for them, we will do it. Actually our faction in the parliament will vote today for the new government," Klyuev, a deputy from Yanukovych's Party of Regions, said in the interview, conducted on the condition that his location was not disclosed.

Klyuev also said that his brother Andrei, the president's former chief of staff, was still in Ukraine and recovering from a gunshot wound.

Andriy was shot — but not seriously — after Yanukovych and he fled Kiev in an uprising.

"He got surgery and now he is recovering. I do not know the details but I think he is much better now," Sergei Klyuev said without elaborating on his sibling's exact location.

Andriy, who could not be reached for comment, is wanted for arrest by the new Ukraine authorities over his suspected involvement in the killing of protesters during Yanukovych's crackdown, according to a statement by Oleh Makhnytsky, the acting prosecutor general of Ukraine.

In an interview on Wednesday, Makhnytsky said Andrei Klyuev's personal assets also were under investigation, because of his closeness to the president. Makhnytsky would not comment on whether Sergei Klyuev was under investigation, although other law-enforcement officials said Thursday that he was not accused of any crime.

Ready to Return

Despite the conditions he set for the interview, Sergei Klyuev said he was ready to return and declared that he was unafraid of being charged by a new government, which his party would support in a bid to keep the country whole and end street violence that he said included mobs attacking his house with guns and molotov cocktails.

"I can return right now. Actually my plan to return depends on my health condition. I plan to return tomorrow," he said, occasionally pacing and wiping his brow to cope with a fever that he said kept him from sleeping well.

Asked about Yanukovych, he said: "I have no idea where he is. I have never been in touch and I'm not in touch now."

The discovery of what lay behind the walls of the presidential retreat at Mezhyhirya outside Kiev — from private golf course and pet zoo to a fake Spanish galleon — and of other luxury homes around the country has sparked anger and suspicion in Ukraine that Yanukovych and his associates may have taken a substantial slice from public contracts.

Ukraine's acting prosecutor general said Wednesday that the country would urgently contact international organizations with an official request to help trace bank accounts and assets controlled by Yanukovych and his inner circle.

The retreat at Mezhyhirya, for example, was owned by a holding company, Tantalit, controlled by Klyuev, 44.

"I bought [it] just to make a huge real estate project but I did not even change management,"

he said. "It was just a clean purchase. I spent my money and that was it, basically."

He said he bought Tantalit on the secondary market, not from the state, and still owns it.
"What happened, happened. I don't see the problem."

Since the ousting of Yanukovich, parliament voted that Mezhyhirya should be returned to state control.

Klyuev pledged to cooperate fully with the authorities.

"I am open to the police, to financial authorities, to show everything. We did nothing wrong."

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