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Former Russian Tycoon Leaves Karabakh Shelter to Face Accusers in Moscow

By Giorgi Lomsadze for Eurasianet

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German Sterligov, the founder of Russia's first commodity exchange.

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He had a flat in downtown New York and a castle in Burgundy, but gave it all up for a hayseed village life; most recently, in disputed Nagorno Karabakh. He is German Sterligov, the founder of Russia's first commodity exchange, and he recently came out of his hermitage in the breakaway territory to face enemies and possibly prosecution back in Moscow.

One of post-Soviet Russia's first millionaires, 48-year-old Sterligov, who advocates a return to the old Russian alphabet, tsarism and living off the land, earlier this month fled the blandishments of the Moscow region to set up operations in bucolic Karabakh, the longtime battlefield between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

But it was not to be. Sterligov on July 16 will return to Moscow to dispel accusations of offering training facilities to a Russian ultranationalist group suspected of involvement in several killings in Russia, including the 2009 murder of human-rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and Novaya Gazeta journalist Anastasia Baburova.

In a July 13 press-conference, he called the accusations "a lie."

One of his aides has linked the campaign against Sterligov in Russia to his historical opus, "From Adam to Putin," in which he wishes that the Russian president would become a Christian. Sterligov accuses the Russian Orthodox Church of heresy.

Dressed (and bearded) like a latter-day Leo Tolstoy, Sterligov, as did the great Russian novelist, promotes simple living, or *oproshcheniye*. Yet with a business angle. His family-run company, located on a farm outside of Moscow, sells (and promotes online) a variety of back-to-the-earth products. Orthodox Christian men without rings and satanic symbols, and women without make-up and clad in long skirts and headscarves were welcome to visit.

So, why leave it all behind? In a statement posted on YouTube, he said that the hospitality and kindness of Karabakh's people ultimately prompted him to set up shop in the breakaway territory.

Azerbaijan has its own ideas about that one. On July 7, it slapped the onetime tycoon on its black list for having traveled to Karabakh, noting that he "could not not have known that the territory is a favorable place for laundering dirty money through Armenia's banking system and for the carrying out of criminal activities," local news sites reported.

Baku, as is its wont, has been busy warning of possible war over Sterligov's territory of choice, if Armenia does not compromise on it. Russia, France and the US are expected to launch another round of shuttle diplomacy over the territory next week, RFE/RL reported.

Sterligov claimed that he would not want to drive a wedge between Karabakh and Russia, and, so, goes peacefully back to Moscow. His wife and five children will be left to the "protection of the Armenians" of Karabakh, he said.

But ultimately he does not seem to care about such worldly matters as a separatist dispute.

"I have quietly, without any pomp and noise, moved to Karabakh, bought a mill, begun grinding grain . . . checked prices for sheep," Sterligov told Gordonua.com. "Where else would I go? Not to the US, where same-sex marriage is permitted . . . nor to Europe, knowns for its gender perversions . . . Nor I have anything to do with the Muslims, for I am a Christian man."

In his view, that leaves Karabakh as the only option.

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