

'I Created the System': Kremlin's Ousted 'Grey Cardinal' Surkov, in Quotes

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Vladislav Surkov had supervised the Kremlin's policy on Ukraine during a period that included the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in the country's east. **Andrei Lyubimov / Moskva News Agency**

President Vladimir Putin's longtime aide Vladislav Surkov has [spoken out](#) for the first time since his dismissal last week.

Putin formally [sacked](#) Surkov seven years after he began supervising the Kremlin's policy on Ukraine, a period that included the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in the country's east. Surkov's former aide Alexei Chesnakov [announced](#) in January that the so-called "grey cardinal" of the Kremlin had resigned because of a "policy change."

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Here is a selection of Surkov's quotes from his interview with Chesnakov published Wednesday, exactly a month after Chesnakov first [broke the news](#):

— On Putin's presidency after 2024

“If presidential powers are refined [in the proposed [constitutional amendments](#)], then legal logic will dictate the need to start counting presidential terms again.” [The Kremlin later [dismissed](#) the assertion as Surkov’s own opinion after the interview’s publication.]

“We have, in fact, naturally developed not just a presidential but a hyper-presidential form of government. It’s organic to our political culture and, in my opinion, it should be solidified formally and legally.”

— On Ukraine

“There is no Ukraine, there is just Ukrainian-ness. It’s a specific kind of mental illness. ... Oddly enough, I’m a ‘Ukroptimist.’ In other words, I think there’s no Ukraine yet. But it will [form] over time.”

“I don’t have a strong enough imagination to envision [eastern Ukraine returning to the Ukrainian government’s control]. Donbass doesn’t deserve such humiliation. Ukraine doesn’t deserve such an honor.”

“[Upon [returning to the Kremlin](#) after a brief dismissal in 2013] I got a unique opportunity to pick a project myself. I chose Ukraine. Purely intuitively. No one told me and I didn’t know anything. No one knew for sure [what would happen].”

“I just felt or rather sensed that it would be a big deal. Even then, when nothing had unfolded yet, I guessed that there would be a serious struggle with the West. With victims and sanctions... I’m proud to have been a participant.”

— On why he left the Kremlin

“Let’s say the context has changed. That is, I ultimately had to continue to deal with [Ukraine]. But the context has changed.”

“Even then [in 2013] I realized I had no place in the system. I created the system, of course, but I was never part of it.”

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