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### **Khodorkovsky believes in Medvedev**

Imprisoned former oligarch praises the Kremlin chief in an interview with the Financial Times Deutschland · Hope for a dismissal of the case · Positive signals

BY Nils Kreimeier, Berlin

Given President Dmitry Medvedev's modernisation policy, the imprisoned former Russian oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky cherishes hopes for his release from prison in the near future. "Undoubtedly, we will soon learn the position of the Kremlin with regard to my concrete case, as the trial already appears to have failed from a legal point of view," Khodorkovsky stated in a written interview with the Financial Times Deutschland. Two prominent witnesses – former Economy Minister German Gref and Trade and Industry Minister Viktor Khristenko - had refuted "the vital allegations of the prosecution".

The former oligarch said about President Medvedev that the head of state was "more open-minded about a dialogue with society. The President's genuine willingness to move towards the rule of law, democratic leadership methods and towards fighting corruption at all levels is currently put to the test." Khodorkovsky renewed his claim to summon the former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder as a witness. "Among other sources, we know from official statements that Mr Putin outlined the reasons for my prosecution and arrest to him. These reasons are contradictory to the charges presented to me," he stated. The dismissal of the current case would send a strong signal to the EU and the USA, where the Khodorkovsky case is seen as an example for the lack of legal security in Russia. Since the onset of the global economic crisis, Medvedev has focused his efforts on attracting investors into the country to reduce its dependency on oil and gas exports. If this trial ended or Khodorkovsky were to be acquitted of the charges against him, the former boss of the oil concern Yukos would be released in the autumn of next year. Until then, he will have to serve a previous disputed sentence.

Over the past months, signals pointing towards a favourable outcome for Khodorkovsky were mounting. At the end of June, Khristenko's and Gref's statements in Moscow were unequivocally in favour of the accused and rejected the accusation that he had misappropriated 350m tonnes of oil during his time at Yukos. Previously, Kremlin advisor Igor Yurgens had sharply criticised the current lawsuit and asked for its dismissal. It is also seen as a positive sign that proceedings against the gravely ill former Yukos vice president Vasily Aleksanyan were dropped at the end of June. There is also growing international support for Khodorkovsky: The Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel, who called Khodorkovsky a "political prisoner" a short while ago, is campaigning for the prisoner's release with his foundation.

According to observers, it will be a political decision whether the Moscow case generating international sympathy will actually be closed. One important aspect could be whether the Kremlin continues to fear political activities from Khodorkovsky: 2012, the year after his potential release, the next presidential elections are due.

Khodorkovsky himself says about possible future activities as a free man: "First and foremost, I have a family who has been waiting for me for many years. I have a granddaughter that I haven't even seen. I very much hope that I won't be presented with the alternative to either leave the country or to stay in prison for the second time.

In terms of my professional activities, the oil business is a closed chapter as far as I'm concerned."

Khodorkovsky appreciates the "support from representatives of all political parties in Germany." He appealed to the Federal Government of Germany to maintain a critical attitude towards the Russian leadership. It is important "to support Medvedev in his plans to modernise the country". At the same time, "Russia's real friends cannot keep quiet about the lack of the rule of law and an independent judicial system". According to the prisoner, "the history of the last century provided us with a lot of sad examples for partnerships based exclusively on misinterpreted pragmatism." With regard to his own case, Khodorkovsky voiced his sharp criticism of the judicial system: He stated that "the court continues to refuse the right to the defence to acknowledge very important documents as evidence that were confiscated by the investigators, but hidden from the court". Furthermore, the prosecutors refused to present evidence for their accusations." Everybody knows: The prosecution cannot present this evidence, as in actual fact no crude oil disappeared, as the accusations are fabricated, as there are no material or legal reasons for this court case."

**Photo** Fighting Russia's judicial system: Former Yukos boss Mikhail Khodorkovsky behind a glass wall in the Moscow courtroom