

Luzhkov Fired Over 'Loss of Confidence'

By [Alexandra Odynova](#)

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Mayor Yury Luzhkov participating in a friendly football match between government officials in September 2002. **Igor Tabakov**

Yury Luzhkov arrived at his City Hall office on Tuesday morning just as the Kremlin released a decree signed by President Dmitry Medvedev in China that ordered his dismissal for a “loss of confidence” in his ability to remain in the job.

After 18 years in the job, Luzhkov did not quit work immediately. He attended a City Hall meeting and accepted late greetings from already former colleagues for his 74th birthday, which he celebrated on Sept. 21 in Austria.

He was seen leaving his office at noon, accompanied by Iosif Kobzon, a legendary crooner, State Duma deputy and a close friend. But both soon returned to the building, Interfax reported, without elaborating.

Kobzon later urged the Kremlin to explain why it had “beheaded” Moscow.

“You can't just decide the fate of such a great statesman as Yury Mikhailovich and you can't behead Moscow so easily without any explanation,” Kobzon said, RIA-Novosti reported.

Luzhkov made no public comment Tuesday, but The New Times magazine released a copy of a letter that he had written to Medvedev where he said his dismissal was punishment for a 2008 proposal to reinstate direct gubernatorial elections and his support for a highway through the Khimki forest.

Luzhkov also resigned from United Russia, which he had co-founded. A senior party official, Andrei Vorobyov, said in a statement on the party's web site that Luzhkov's resignation letter was signed Sunday but not received until Tuesday.

Luzhkov in Photos

See images of Yury Luzhkov's nearly two decades in office in our [first photo gallery](#) or [second photo gallery](#) from Moscow Times photographers.

Luzhkov blamed United Russia officials in his resignation letter, saying they "did not provide any support and did not want to sort things out and stop the flow of lies and slander," said a senior party official, Vladimir Semago.

Luzhkov's departure had been widely expected after state-controlled television initiated an anti-mayor campaign earlier this month, but few had expected Medvedev to fire the mayor while in China, where he wound up a three-day visit Tuesday.

"As the president of Russia, I have lost my trust in Yury Mikhailovich Luzhkov as the mayor of Moscow," Medvedev told journalists in Shanghai.

He added that more dismissals might follow, but did not elaborate.

Medvedev did not say who he would nominate as the next mayor, but party secretary Vyacheslav Volodin said United Russia would soon present the president with a list of possible successors. Medvedev has the right to pick from the list or choose someone else to forward to the City Duma for confirmation.

Medvedev named Luzhkov's first deputy Vladimir Resin as acting mayor. Resin, 74, oversees the city's construction industry and is famous for his taste in expensive wristwatches. A photo published by Vedomosti last year showed him wearing a Swiss watch worth more than \$1 million.

Medvedev's spokeswoman Natalya Timakova said Tuesday that Luzhkov had been offered the chance to step down and had been given a week to think over his plans, news agencies reported. But the mayor said upon returning from a weeklong vacation in Austria on Monday that he would not step down.

Luzhkov's term was to expire next July, but analysts say the Kremlin needed to replace him well ahead of next year's State Duma elections to ensure good results for United Russia.

The mayor clashed with Medvedev a few weeks ago by writing an article for Rossiiskaya Gazeta in which he favored Prime Minister Vladimir Putin over the president in the dispute over the highway through the Khimki forest.

Timakova said Medvedev informed Putin about Luzhkov's ouster before he signed the decree.

Putin, who heads United Russia, criticized Luzhkov on Tuesday for failing to establish good relations with Medvedev.

“Yury Mikhailovich has done a lot for the development of Moscow and is, to some extent, a landmark figure for modern Russia,” Putin said on Channel One television during a trip to Syktyvkar. “But it's absolutely clear that the Moscow mayor didn't get along with the president, and the mayor is subordinate to the president, not the other way around.”

Boris Gryzlov, who heads United Russia's faction in the State Duma and serves as Duma speaker, said in a statement that Medvedev had warned the party about his decision last Thursday.

Luzhkov did not appear to be saddened by his dismissal, said Oleg Mitvol, prefect for Moscow's Northern Administrative District.

“He was ready for the decree. He said he won't retire,” Mitvol wrote on his Twitter blog.

Luzhkov plans to campaign for a return of direct mayoral elections in Moscow, an unidentified senior city official told Interfax on Tuesday.

The mayor has 10 days to appeal his removal in the Supreme Court, City Duma Speaker Vladimir Platonov said late Tuesday, RIA-Novosti reported. He did not say whether Luzhkov planned to appeal but pointed out that as a retired mayor he would be entitled to lavish state support, including bodyguards, a dacha, medical insurance, a pension and travel expenses.

Luzhkov, in office since 1992, earned a reputation of a political heavyweight, although his dreams of moving to the Kremlin were shattered with Putin's ascension in 2000.

But a cloud was cast on the four-term mayor's future when Medvedev began to implement a new policy of removing regional leaders after three terms.

Investigators have opened several criminal cases into City Hall officials in recent months, inquiries that were widely seen as Kremlin-orchestrated attacks aimed at weakening Luzhkov.

Speculation grew that he was on his way out when he faced harsh criticism in the media for not immediately cutting short an Austrian vacation while Moscow choked in heavy smog in August.

Tensions climaxed when state-controlled television started broadcasting a series of reports about corruption in the city, implicating the mayor and his billionaire wife, Yelena Baturina, who heads the Inteko construction company.

The Investigative Committee denied reports Tuesday that new criminal cases have been

opened recently into city officials, Itar-Tass reported.

Luzhkov's dismissal marks the first time that Medvedev has fired a regional leader because of a "loss of confidence." As president, Putin used the pretext three times, firing Koryak autonomous district Governor Vladimir Loginov in 2005, Nenets autonomous district Governor Alexei Barinov in 2006 and Amur Governor Leonid Korotkov in 2007. Barinov and Korotkov also were targeted in criminal cases.

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