

Abramovich Beats 'Dishonest' Berezovsky in Court

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Roman Abramovich **Denis Grishkin**

LONDON — Billionaire Roman Abramovich emerged victorious from a \$5.6 billion legal battle with former mentor Boris Berezovsky in a London court ruling that delighted the Kremlin.

Berezovsky, who became a power broker under President Boris Yeltsin only to fall foul of Vladimir Putin, had accused Abramovich of using the threat of Kremlin retribution to intimidate him into selling stakes in oil company Sibneft and aluminum firm RusAl at knockdown prices.

But Judge Elizabeth Gloster told a packed London courtroom Friday that she had found Berezovsky to be an “unimpressive and inherently unreliable witness” who gave sometimes dishonest evidence and would say “almost anything to support his case.”

Gloster dismissed all of Berezovsky's \$5.6 billion in claims in one of the biggest private litigation cases ever, saying Abramovich was a "truthful and on the whole reliable witness."

"I am absolutely amazed about what happened today," Berezovsky, 66, told reporters after listening expressionless as the verdict was read out in a modern, glass courtroom crowded with lawyers, bodyguards and journalists.

"My confidence in English justice has been undermined by the judge's decision," he said, adding that the ruling was so sympathetic to Putin that it read as if the president had written it himself.

But such a stinging rebuke from one of Britain's most experienced commercial judges is likely to cement Berezovsky's reputation as a publicity-seeker and opens him up to claims for costs that could exceed \$100 million.

"There was a marked contrast between the manner in which Mr. Berezovsky gave his evidence and that in which Mr. Abramovich did so," Gloster [said](#) in an hourlong dissection of Berezovsky's claim, which delved into the murky world of Russian business.

Abramovich denied that Berezovsky owned the assets and said that he merely paid Berezovsky for political cover and protection — known in Russian gangster slang as "krysha," or "roof."

Judge Gloster, who stumbled at times trying to pronounce "krysha," said that though she felt the court had not gotten the full picture of the relations between Berezovsky, his late partner Badri Patarkatsishvili, and Abramovich, she had dismissed the \$5 billion Sibneft claim and another \$565 million claim relating to claimed ownership in RusAl.

Abramovich was not in court to hear the verdict, and his team of lawyers, led by Karyl Nairn, a litigation partner at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, merely smiled as the judge read out her lengthy statement.

"There were many serious allegations made against Mr. Abramovich by Mr. Berezovsky, including attacks on Mr. Abramovich's honesty and integrity," Abramovich's investment vehicle, Millhouse, said in a statement. "We are pleased that the judge has firmly rejected all such allegations and has described Mr. Abramovich as a truthful and frank witness who showed a responsible and honest approach when giving evidence in this case."

At Putin's Novo-Ogaryovo residence, outside Moscow, his spokesman suggested Berezovsky had slandered Russia during the hearings.

"It is always a pleasure when slander is called by its true name," Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told reporters when asked about the case.

Russian state television reports cast the legal battle as evidence of the dire state the country was in following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

"We've heard a great deal here in the last few months as the lawyers dragged once-confidential information out of the former friends, now opponents, about ways to make billions in a half-destitute country," Rossia-1 television said.

Berezovsky said he was considering whether to appeal.

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