

# Berezovsky Dies Amid Growing Woes

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Ex-oligarch Boris Berezovsky, pictured in 1997, died Saturday after a series of personal and financial setbacks. **Igor Tabakov**

As speculation swirled after Boris Berezovsky's sudden demise, friends and associates suggested that a series of personal and financial shocks suffered by the former Kremlin kingmaker and billionaire could have contributed to depression and mounting health problems.

Hints that Berezovsky may have taken his own life, or that British or Russian security services were involved, refused to disappear Sunday as British officials said a postmortem was not yet under way.

Berezovsky's body was not removed from his large house outside London where he was found dead on the bathroom floor on Saturday afternoon as it was checked overnight for chemical, biological and nuclear material, according to a statement by local police. No traces of such material were found.

A series of enemies of the Kremlin have died under suspicious circumstances in recent years in Britain, including ex-KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko who died from polonium-210 poisoning in 2006.

"I would always assume the perfidy of the Chekists," London exile and cell phone tycoon Yevgeny Chichvarkin told the Dozhd television channel, using the name for the security service formed by the Bolsheviks after the 1917 Revolution.

"It is not impossible that Berezovsky could have been liquidated," said Sergei Markov, a member of the Public Chamber and deputy rector of Plekhanov University of Economics.

But there was also widespread evidence Sunday that a messy divorce, the breakup of a long-term relationship and financial losses in recent months had generated a strong homesickness, made Berezovsky's behavior increasingly erratic and caused a deterioration in his health.

On Jan. 18, in a nascent legal battle with former partner Yelena Gorbunova, a British judge said Berezovsky was "a man under financial pressure."

The court documents paint a picture of a debtor trying desperately to stay afloat.

Berezovsky has a tendency "to promise one thing in relation to particular assets ... and then to do another," the judge said.

It was not Berezovsky's first public humiliation at the hands of a London judge.

In 2012, he lost the largest civil court case in British legal history to billionaire and former business partner Roman Abramovich, which left his reputation dented and a legal bill of millions of dollars.

The High Court savaged Berezovsky in its judgement in the case, characterizing him as "an unimpressive and inherently unreliable witness who regarded truth as a transitory, flexible concept which could be molded to suit his current purposes."

In 2011, his record divorce settlement with his second wife, Galina Besharova, cost Berezovsky, who has six children, between \$260 million and \$360 million.

In efforts to assuage his creditors, he has fired staff, shut an office in London's expensive Mayfair district, and sold property and his collection of antique cars. Last week, he auctioned off a silk Andy Warhol print of Vladimir Lenin to the tune of \$202,017.

"He talked openly to me about his financial difficulties in connection with [former partner] Badri Patarkatsishvili's death and in connection with the defeat in court against Abramovich," Yury Felshtinsky, Berezovsky's friend of 15 years and co-author of a book about the Russian security services, said in an e-mailed statement.

Berezovsky reached an out-of-court settlement with Patarkatsishvili's estate last year.

The businessman and politician, renowned for his irrepressible energy, was reportedly suffering from health problems in the weeks before his death.

"It was a heart attack," Alexei Venediktov, Ekho Moskvy's editor-in-chief and a former colleague, said late Saturday. "For the last two weeks, he had had several."

The battle with Abramovich cost Berezovsky about \$60 million, and it left him emotionally scarred, Venediktov said. "He was in a serious depression. He was being treated in Israel."

Berezovsky's melancholia appeared to come to a head in a meeting he had with Forbes journalist Ilya Zhegulyov on Friday.

"I have lost the meaning of life," he told Zhegulyov the day before he died. "I don't know what to do. I am 67 years old. And I don't what to do anymore."

Zhegulyov declined to comment further on Berezovsky's condition when contacted by The Moscow Times, citing the ongoing police investigation into the death.

Berezovsky left Russia in 2000 and watched from abroad as a series of criminal charges stacked up against him. The only official position left to him in Russia was his membership in the Russian Academy of Sciences.

"The hopelessness of his present situation, of course, brought full-scale clinical depression in its train," Mikhail Kozyrev, a journalist and colleague of Berezovsky's, told Dozhd television Sunday. "He suddenly, unexpectedly abandoned the hope that he would someday again see his homeland, which he loved a lot."

Berezovsky's enemies also highlighted his plight at the end of his life as poetic justice for a man accused of building a huge personal fortune by sucking the money out of successful businesses, such as national carrier Aeroflot, and virtually bankrupting them.

"He lived life in vain and ended up without family, without homeland, without money and without friends," Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov said in comments carried by state-run RIA-Novosti. "An absolutely appropriate finale."

Using his media holdings, including the ORT television channel, Berezovsky was one of the architect's of Zyuganov's defeat at the hands of Boris Yeltsin in the 1996 presidential election.

And former Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov, another bitter political opponent of Berezovsky, said his death was a result of two reasons.

"The first was total political defeat and the second was, probably, financial ruin. ... [It was the] denouement of a personal catastrophe," Luzhkov told Dozhd.

No details about plans for Berezovsky's funeral were available Sunday. But the Kremlin would not be opposed to considering a request for holding the event in Moscow, said President Vladimir Putin's press secretary, Dmitry Peskov.

British police appeared to be focusing on Berezovsky's emotional state. "The investigation team is building a picture of the last days of Berezovsky's life, speaking to close friends and family to gain a better understanding of his state of mind," Kevin Brown, the senior detective leading the investigation, said in a statement published late Sunday.

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