The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Colonel Cleared in Chubais Attack

By Alexander Bratersky

August 22, 2010



Vladimir Kvachkov, a former military intelligence colonel who was acquitted of trying to kill Anatoly Chubais.

A jury has acquitted a group of nationalists headed by a former military intelligence colonel of trying to kill Anatoly Chubais, an architect of Russia's market reforms, in a high-profile retrial that cast rare light on anger in some military circles toward Vladimir Putin's rule.

The jury on Friday also ruled that the attempt on Chubais' life in 2005 was real, squashing speculation that the incident was a ruse staged by authorities as a pretext to crack down on nationalists.

Retired Colonel Vladimir Kvachkov, 62, and three co-defendants were cleared of all charges by the jury in the Moscow Regional Court late Friday, a court spokeswoman said.

The same court previously cleared Kvachkov, along with former paratroopers Robert Yashin and Alexander Naidenov as well as nationalist writer Ivan Mironov, in a jury trial in 2008, but the Supreme Court ordered a retrial last year.

Supporters of Kvachkov, an outspoken anti-Semite, cheered the verdict in the courtroom, shouting, "Hurray!" and "Thank you!"

Prosecutors did not say whether they would appeal, but Kvachkov said he expected them to.

Kvachkov — who told The Moscow Times that Chubais is the head of an "Judeo-Protestant" group that rules Russia — also criticized Prime Minister Putin's government, saying it was "Nazi-liberal."

Investigators claimed that Kvachkov and his accomplices attacked the cortege of Chubais, then-head of the Unified Energy System electricity monopoly, on a highway in the Moscow region on March 17, 2005.

A bomb with the equivalent of 3.5 to 11 kilograms of dynamite went off on the road, and the cortege was pelted with bullets from machine guns. No one was injured in the attack.

The jury on Friday did not implicate anyone else in the attack, which means that the investigation will probably have to be reopened.

Chubais, who now heads Rusnano, the state nanotechnology corporation, said he accepted the jury's "processual decision" but remained convinced that Kvachkov was the perpetrator.

"I have no doubt that in real life it was Kvachkov and the other defendants who tried to kill me," he said in a statement posted on Rusnano's web site Saturday.

"Honestly, I don't feel like taking revenge against them. But I absolutely do not accept the fascist ideology that these people advocate," Chubais said, adding that he would not contest the court's decision.

Kvachkov, who wore his military uniform covered with medals at the trial, spent more than 30 years in military service and later worked as a civilian expert at the armed forces' General Staff.

He is an explosives expert, which led some military officers to doubt his involvement in the attempt on Chubais' life, simply because he would not have botched the job.

"If he would carry out such an operation, the outcome would be positive," a former military intelligence officer told the Vremya Novostei newspaper in 2005.

Kvachkov has never denied his hatred for Chubais, an architect of Russian economic reforms in the early 1990s that steered the country toward capitalism but also, as nationalists claim, robbed the nation of its wealth through privatization.

"I do not want to kill Chubais, but I really want him to be hanged by a court order," Kvachkov told Ekho Moskvy radio in a 2008 interview.

But he told The Moscow Times that he did not quit his job after the Soviet collapse because he "wanted to serve the motherland." He said he had still voiced his views openly, to the detriment of his career.

“If I hadn't expressed oppositionalist views, I would have been a general by now,” he said in an interview hours before Friday's verdict.

After his arrest, Kvachkov became a symbol for nationalists, for whom Chubais remains a top public enemy.

When Kvachkov was leaving the courtroom Friday, a crowd of his supporters shouted curses at Chubais.

Now Kvachkov heads People's Militia, a nationalist movement of several hundred members named after the force that merchant Kozma Minin and Prince Dmitry Pozharsky assembled during the political tumult of the early 17th century to oust occupying Polish forces from the country.

“I adore him, and I am ready to fight for him in battle,” Sergei Ivanov, a member of People's Militia who attended Friday's hearing, said of Kvachkov.

Ivanov, who was wearing a red T-shirt with a Soviet Union coat of arms, said he joined Kvachkov's movement in 2008 and was a member of the ruling United Russia party and a fan of Putin prior to that.

He is not the only Russian swayed by Kvachkov. One of the colonel's supporters — a retired military officer — said on condition of anonymity Friday that many former and active army officers share Kvachkov's views and think that the solution to Russia's problems is to establish a military dictatorship.

“There would be no democracy, and the national oil industry should be nationalized,” he said.

Investigators said during the trial that Kvachkov and the other suspects had spent months hatching the plot, renting an apartment near Chubais' house in the Moscow region and using the colonel's own dacha as their headquarters. Police claimed that they even found a paper with the license plate number of Chubais' car in Kvachkov's car.

But most evidence submitted by prosecutors was dismissed by defense lawyers as circumstantial during the trial, and jurors appeared to agree.

Kvachkov was arrested in 2005 and spent three years in detention before being released after the first trial.

In 2005, while in detention, he ran for a State Duma seat in Moscow, ultimately losing to a United Russia rival but still gathering a veritable 30 percent of the vote.

“March 17 brought me to public life,” Kvachkov said, referring to the date of the attempt on Chubais' life.

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