

Chichvarkin Says He Fears for His Life

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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LONDON — Former cell phone magnate Yevgeny Chichvarkin rules out leaving his exile in Britain voluntarily and says he will be killed in prison if he loses a court battle against extradition to Moscow.

Chichvarkin, who helped found Yevroset, one of Russia's biggest mobile phone retailers, would be the first person to be extradited from Britain to Russia if he loses the case. A London court will consider the extradition request on Sept. 13.

The flamboyant businessman fled to self-imposed exile in Britain in 2008. Russian officials accuse him of running a mafia-like organization and want him back for crimes, including extortion and kidnapping, dating back to 2003.

Speaking in an interview in a park in London's upscale Mayfair district, Chichvarkin, 35, accused Interior Ministry officials of persecuting him because, he said, he refused to pay bribes.

"I [fled] because otherwise I would have been jailed on trumped up charges," said Chichvarkin, wearing pink shoes, torn jeans and an orange shirt embroidered with shiny studs. "Since we were the biggest company [in the sector], we were expected to give more than others. But we did not want to."

An Interior Ministry spokesman in Moscow declined to comment on the case.

Asked if he could go back, Chichvarkin said: "So they could kill me in jail? ... First they will try to extract money out of me and then just kill me."

Unmet extradition requests have been a sore point in Russia's relations with Britain — which hosts a growing number of exiles from former Soviet countries — in recent years.

Chichvarkin said he believes that his 60-year-old mother, found dead in her Moscow apartment in April, was murdered.

"I am convinced it was a murder. ... We will never know the truth," said Chichvarkin, sporting his trademark mullet hairstyle. "I do have suspicions; that's understandable."

An investigation is ongoing, but police have said they think that the death was not suspicious.

Now living in southeast England in a house with a banya, Chichvarkin has become increasingly vocal, attending an opposition protest earlier in the week outside the Russian Embassy.

He said he still thinks that Russia is a lucrative place for investors to make money as long as they have strong patronage.

"Russia is a market where you can make a lot of money. It's risky," he said. "If you know who is protected by whom, which businesses will never be attacked and which ones are about to be confiscated, then you can make lots of money."

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