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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Mayor Slain in '90s-Style Killing

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Dushko

A gunman killed the mayor of Sergiyev Posad, a popular tourist destination just north of Moscow, outside his private house Monday in a gangland-style killing reminiscent of the 1990s.

Mayor Yevgeny Dushko, 35, had made many enemies, including among construction companies and communal services, local residents told The Moscow Times. Investigators said Dushko's killing was probably related to his work.

Dushko, a United Russia member who had received death threats at least as far back as 2009, was elected mayor by the city legislature in April through a controversial scheme that was later ruled illegal by the Justice Ministry.

An unidentified assailant pumped seven bullets into Dushko as he left his home on Sovietskaya Ulitsa in Sergiyev Posad around 7:30 a.m. Monday, Moscow region investigators said in a statement.

Media reports said Dushko actually got into his car before the shots were fired, and Dushko's father, hearing the gunfire, ran out of the building and tried to drive his son to the hospital, but the mayor died en route.

Investigators said Dushko died at the hospital.

No suspects were named.

Dushko's killing "might be linked to his professional activities or his previous business activities," Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin said, RIA-Novosti reported.

An unidentified law enforcement official told RIA-Novosti that professional activities are the prime lead in the investigation because Dushko "took up the city's economy not long ago [and] ... started actively working in a number of directions that somebody might not have liked."

Sergiyev Posad, a historic city of about 105,000 people located 60 kilometers north of Moscow, is most famous for being home to the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius, the largest monastery in Russia and the official residence of the Russian Orthodox patriarch since 1983.

Sergiyev Posad had also been mentioned recently in media reports in connection with an illegal gambling ring in the Moscow region set up by businessman Ivan Nazarov and purportedly covered up by prosecutors and police.

Dushko, a Sergiyev Posad native, was elected mayor in April by the 25-member legislature that he chaired at the time and continued to chair while being mayor, thus serving as head of both the executive and legislative branches of the city.

Residents contacted by telephone said it would be hard to guess who was behind the killing because Dushko had many foes.

"Dushko had plenty of evil-wishers," said Olga Kanatnikova, a reporter with the local weekly newspaper Novoye Zerkalo.

Many local businesspeople had failed to reach an understanding with Dushko and gathered at least twice to discuss "how to resist what they believed to be Dushko's corrupt politics," she said.

Kanatnikova said speculation had run rampant that Dushko was seizing plum land plots and privatizing them in the name of a relative.

Kanatnikova also said Dushko had "stood in open opposition" to Posad Energo, a local management company involved in communal services.

"Dushko suspected Posad Energo of defrauding the people, while it accused him of power abuse," Kanatnikova said, refusing to elaborate because of lack of documentary evidence.

Posad Energo officials were not immediately available for comment.

Alexander Golub, a member of the Moscow region branch of the Communist Party, said

the local business community was grieved because Dushko "tried to meddle in the established system of communal services" by promoting the interests of new management companies at the expense of those already operating in the city.

Dushko also promoted a new management company for the uncompleted construction of an apartment complex called Zolotiye Vorota in Sergiyev Posad, which displeased both investors and the current developer, Golub said.

Golub refused to mention any company names.

But Kanatnikova said Dushko publicly quarreled with a representative of Zolotiye Vorota's current developer, Yevroinvest LTD, at a rally Saturday outside the city hall.

Yevroinvest officials could not be reached for comment after office hours Monday evening.

Last month, Dushko vowed on local Tonus television to fight against graft, calling corrupt officials "turds" and "scum," the Sergiyev Posad news agency reported in late July.

The previous mayor, Nikolai Maslov, was elected in a popular vote in October 2009 but dismissed by the local legislature in January. In March, local lawmakers abolished popular mayoral elections with a new town charter.

The Justice Ministry registered the charter in March but canceled the registration in late June, making the charter and consequently the April elections illegal, local newspaper Novoye Zerkalo reported in late July.

Dushko told the local weekly at the time that the ministry's regional branch had sent him a copy of the ministry's cancellation but had not taken any action on it.

Under the charter, the mayorship became a political post, while the town was governed by a city manager, Yury Kalmykov, who was elected to the post by local lawmakers in June. He heads United Russia's faction in the legislature.

Dushko graduated with degrees in sociology and economics and later worked for IMA Group, one of the largest communication service holdings in Russia, according to an old version of his official biography on the legislature's web site. After that, he served as chief editor at the local television station and host of political talk shows on local television and radio.

Dushko was elected to the legislature in July 2009 after working for three years as deputy head of the Sergiyev Posad municipal district, which unites the town of Sergiyev Posad and its outskirts, according to his current official biography posted on the legislature's web site.

In late July 2009, four unidentified "stalwart" young men approached him on the street and recommended that he "take into account the opinion" of the head of the Sergiyev Posad municipal district, Vladimir Korotkov, when deciding legislative issues, Dushko told the local newspaper Kopeika at the time. Korotkov still holds his post.

In 2010, Dushko was granted the title of Sergiyev Posad's "person of the year" in a first annual ceremony hosted by Agentstvo Razvitiye, a local development and promotion agency linked to the local administration, Posad-persona.ru said.

Dushko's official biography did not indicate whether he is married.

Tabloid news site Lifenews.ru reported that Dushko had a wife and children and that they were on vacation abroad.

Dushko will be buried Wednesday, Rosbalt reported. The report did not name the cemetery.

A new mayor will be elected within five days, Vecherniye Vedomosti reported. The local legislature elected Viktor Kheysin, a local deputy, as acting mayor, RIA-Novosti reported.

At least 40 mayors and deputy mayors have been attacked in Russia since 2000, RIA-Novosti said. Many of them died or were seriously injured.

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