

Q&A: Yury Luzhkov Says He's a Completely Free Man

By [Bela Lyauv](#)

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Luzhkov and Yevgeny Primakov were founders of the Otechestvo Party. **Igor Tabakov**

Immediately after Yury Luzhkov was dismissed from office, his friend and predecessor Gavriil Popov asked him to be dean of the International University in Moscow.

"I want to thank Gavriil Popov for taking me and inviting me to the university. It was a daring step. I have been friends with him and know he is a true scholar, and most importantly, he says what he thinks. This is a rarity in our time," Luzhkov said in response.

Yury Luzhkov

Education

1958 — Gubkin Moscow Petrochemical & Gas Industry Institute

Work Experience

1958-1964 — Moscow Scientific Research Institute of Plastics, researcher
1964-1971 — State Chemistry Committee, management automation department chief
1968 — Joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
1971-1974 — Chemical Industry Ministry of the Soviet Union, automated management systems department, head
1974-1980 — Chemical Industry Ministry of the Soviet Union, experimental design office of automation, head
1977 — Elected to the Moscow City Council (Mossoviet)
1980-1986 — Petrochemical Automation Scientific-Industrial Association, head
1987-1992 — Leadership positions in the Moscow City Executive Committee (Mosgorispolkom)
1992-2010 — Mayor of Moscow

Books Written (partial list)

“72 Hours of Agony: The Beginning and End of the Communist Putsch in Russia” (1991)
“We Are Your Children, Moscow” (1996)
“Russia’s Security: Legal, Socio-Economic and Scientific Aspects” (1998)
“We Did It in Moscow — We’ll Do It in Russia!” (1999)
“The Renewal of History: Humanity in the 21st Century and the Future of Russia” (2002)
“Guide for the Future Mayor: 20 Conversations in a Library” (2003)
“The Secret of Gostiny Dvor: About the City, The World and Myself” (2006)
“On Love ...” (2007)
“Russia 2050 in the System of Global Capitalism: On Our Tasks in the Modern World” (2007)
“Water and Peace” (2008)
“Transcapitalism and Russia” (2009)

Source: Wikipedia

We met Luzhkov in his small office at the university. The interior has an ascetic feel — not to be compared with his mayoral residence. Now Luzhkov spends a lot of his time in Moscow and rarely goes to Vienna to be with his family or to London, where his daughter is studying. Externally, Luzhkov hasn't changed at all since his departure from the mayor's office, but he may be calmer. He has stopped wearing a jacket and tie, and besides teaching, he has taken up farming. Yet he has not stopped following political events, he told Vedomosti.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: You were the founder of United Russia. When the attacks on you started, the party turned its back on you. Do you regret getting the party started?

A: I sincerely regret that we merged Yedinstvo and Otechestvo, which I was one of the founders of. It was our mistake and a mistake by the authorities. The Yedinstvo party was like putty, it lacked any program and was united around one main mission — supporting the government. And Otechestvo, with its left-center focus, suddenly had a number of outstanding people join. In one part of Otechestvo's political program, it declared that it

was necessary to annul privatization. That was the scariest part for those who were in power at the time.

Q: What made you merge?

A: Otechestvo wasn't supported by the authorities and because of its program no big business supported it either and didn't have any money. Without funding, a party can't develop. In 2000 Vladimir Putin was elected president. We met with him a few times and that eased my mind. Putin spoke about the development of democracy and the market economy and restraining the oligarchs. People within Otechestvo began to suggest it merge with Yedinstvo. Yedinstvo leader Sergei Shoigu and I always had good, warm relations. I considered him and still consider him one of the most effective ministers in the new government. We reached an agreement on a merger. United Russia became established to a large extent thanks to the infusion of Otechestvo's intellectual potential, which underpinned it. It seemed to us that Otechestvo's intellect would in time overtake Yedinstvo's numerical advantage. But mass swallowed intellect.

The development of the two parties — Yedinstvo and Otechestvo — could have created a dual system of the European type in Russia. Putin could have chosen that then, could have said to the initiators of the unification, let's build a European model. But he was still a newcomer in office then and he needed a support, not an explanation of the parties' preferences.

Q: Can Putin reconsider the path that has led the country into a dead end and begin the democratic reforms he spoke of at the beginning of his presidency?

A: Not only can he, he should. He should talk before the [March] election about the decisions he is planning to make on changes and democratization in our country. The first decision should be to return the election of governors and mayors, without coordinating with the president. Elections should be free and offer alternatives. It is my conviction that the Federation Council is illegitimate today because it was formed by higher powers. Odious figures appear there who aren't to its credit. When United Russia won the majority of votes in the last election, I said I was disappointed. The State Duma was like a fat bird with one wing that couldn't fly and never would. And it hasn't flown! It has done what the Kremlin or the government has told it to. Today it is obvious that United Russia has no right to be the majority party in the Duma. We got so-called official election results that didn't reflect the real balance of society's political preferences. In today's political structure, there is at least a 40 percent breach.

Q: And who should fill that breach?

A: A new party — a center-left [one].

Q: Could you, with your knowledge and experience, take part in setting up a party like that?

A: Now I am a completely free man!

Q: Many voted not for a specific party, but against the pervasive corruption. For example, they found out that former Prefect Yury Bulanov had an enormous amount of real estate abroad. And your former deputy Alexander Ryabinin has been accused of demanding bribes. Do you

think enough was done in Moscow to avoid these problems?

A: If you mean corruption, certainly not enough was done. We see corruption flourishing throughout the country. But Moscow isn't just part of our state, it's the richest part of it. Let's get something straight. The mayor is responsible, but within the scope of his authority. The mayor is responsible for the city's budget. There are no specific charges now of corrupt actions by the city government. If I had noticed any malfeasance myself, I would have informed the appropriate agencies — the prosecutor's office and police — that they needed to check it. I kept a very close eye on the budget.

I created the city Supervisory Committee and prevented losses from the city budget of about 300 billion rubles (\$10 billion) at today's rate. Ryabinin did not indulge in unscrupulous activities. There was a lot of dissatisfaction with him, from federal structures as well, when he was guarding the city budget. If there was a competition for a contract, for example, and a certain firm won by competing against a dummy firm, the committee caught it and canceled the plan. In both business and the government they had a terrible attitude toward Ryabinin. But what kind of attitude would someone who wants to make money dishonestly have toward him?

Q: You couldn't make any conclusions about the people around you? For instance, your press secretary Sergei Tsoi had a Maybach, and your deputy Vladimir Resin has a watch that costs a million dollars.

A: I didn't look in other people's pockets. You can ask law enforcement agencies why they had such expensive things and where they came from. Tsoi is working somewhere now, and his wife has an income too. And if journalists have seen some watch of Resin's they have doubts about, they can contact the prosecutor.

It's an interesting situation: When I was dismissed from my post, Resin, with this watch you mention, remained first deputy under the new mayor. Why don't you ask the current mayor about it, or a Duma representative, since he is a member now.

Q: Your wife Yelena Baturina said in a recent interview that she paid bribes.

A: What makes you think she gave them to city officials? She worked in many regions of Russia and she worked with federal officials as well. I did not interfere in her business. I had enough of my own.

Q: Do you and Sergei Sobyenin know each other?

A: Yes, we know each other from the Federation Council, but not closely. Our relationship is neutral, there's hasn't been any antagonism.

Q: What advice would you give him?

A: I only have one wish: that he serve both the state and Muscovites well.

Q: Do you think they should have sold Bank of Moscow?

A: The bank was successful and profitable. It serviced the city and its population efficiently.

What was the point of selling it cheap?

Q: And what about the missing hundreds of billions [of rubles]?

A: Why didn't they find those shortages before in their numerous audits? Bank of Moscow is one of the best banks in the country's system. The audits they conducted confirmed its efficiency.

Q: So why did First Deputy Chairman of the Central Bank Alexei Ulyukayev say "Moscow in the Luzhkov period was a special zone where federal laws and oversight requirements did not always apply?"

A: I think he did it for political reasons. If they won't let you work otherwise, you'll make a public statement to get by. The alternative was to leave admitting you couldn't maintain control. I think the money the government spent to reorganize Bank of Moscow was completely unjustified. Borodin is a competent, effective and honest banker.

Q: Are you in contact with him?

A: No. What ties do I have to him? The shares they ascribed to me?

Q: Among other things.

A: I do not have any shares, and I never did. My attitude toward Borodin remains one of respect, and I consider him a victim of persecution.

Q: The city's property policy has changed drastically from when you were in charge. Why did the city increase its noncore assets instead of privatizing them? Especially since the city's income from the assets was only slightly more than its costs.

A: The city had one of the lowest levels of unemployment in the country — 0.6 percent. It was not just a matter of enterprises making a profit. They also employed Muscovites. Our policy was reflected in giving the working man a well-paying job, giving pensioners a decent standard of living and giving young people a free education. Those three elements made it possible to have a peaceful city.

Q: Why did the city experience a collapse in transportation while you were mayor?

A: The transportation situation is a set of varied problems that arose as the city developed. We tried to solve those problems as well as we could, but a constantly growing megalopolis like Moscow cannot cope on its own with the ever-growing load on its transportation infrastructure. Also, the [federal] government was rather neglectful. For example, [former Finance Minister Alexei] Kudrin cancelled one of the road funds. It was something like 13 billion rubles (\$430 million) and was growing well. That was a blow to other regions the fund was developing as well — St. Petersburg [and] Tatarstan.

Q: Besides insufficient road building, there were complaints of buildings being put up without considering transportation.

A: All new neighborhoods were provided with the necessary infrastructure.

Q: What about Moskva-City? The first thing Sobyenin did was to call it a city planning misstep.

A: It is normal practice to concentrate the maximum number of people, businesses, infrastructure and so on in small spaces. If they build everything that was planned — garages, roads, metro lines, turnoffs — things will be fine.

Q: What is your opinion of the expansion of the city?

A: Moscow's expansion is unavoidable. But the decision was made hastily. I don't think it was right. Decisions made from high officials' offices worry me. They should discuss it a thousand times. They should seek the advice of many, many specialists. And only then they should make a decision. I did not see thorough analysis here.

The consequences could be dangerous both in their cost and in their inefficiency. My opinion is that satellite cities — science cities — need to be developed around Moscow, and new centers to attract investment need to be created.

Those satellites have to be connected to Moscow by unique means of transportation so people can get to the capital fast. In other words, you can't build the capital outside the capital. Who's going to pay for it? The government? It won't have the money to build on that scale.

That means investors have to be found. And investors will sell the housing [and] offices, and that means people capable of buying them will come in. And they may not come from Moscow. What will that mean for reducing Moscow's density?

Q: How come, when you go to London, you see historical buildings preserved, but in Moscow there is construction chaos?

A: Moscow has always been an architecturally eclectic city. Arseny Morozov's mansion is a typical example. When he built it, his mother said, "I used to be the only one who knew you were an idiot. Now all of Moscow knows." Today the mansion is considered a source of delight. Eclecticism is a recognized architectural style that is a mixture of other styles. But I always tried to keep glass and concrete out of the center of the city.

Q: What buildings that were built while you were mayor do you like?

A: Fomenko Theater, Theater Et Cetera, and many others.

Q: And of the things Yelena Baturina built?

A: The Shuvalovsky residential district.

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