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British Inquest May Reveal New Details of Litvinenko's Death

By The Moscow Times

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Marina Litvinenko on Friday leaving a hearing into her husband's death. **Toby Melville**

LONDON — A British inquest into the killing of former Federal Security Service officer Alexander Litvinenko may make public previously unreleased details about the murder investigation, a lawyer said.

Litvinenko died in November 2006 after ingesting polonium-210, a rare radioactive isotope that was secretly slipped into his tea at a London hotel. He blamed the Kremlin for his death, which then took relations between Moscow and London to a post-Cold War low.

Inquest lawyer Hugh Davies said the evidence would include surveillance footage, crime scene evidence, medical notes, scientific analysis and witness interviews — offering new details about a sinister poisoning case that grabbed worldwide attention.

Davies added that details of a related German investigation into the circumstances

of Litvinenko's killing could also be published.

"The documents may be made public through the inquest website," he said Friday at a preliminary hearing ahead of the inquest.

In Britain, inquests are held following unexplained or violent deaths. Litvinenko's is set for next year and could begin as soon as March, according to Alex Goldfarb, a friend of Litvinenko who was at the hearing.

Inquests are meant only to determine a cause of death, so they don't apportion blame. But in Litvinenko's case every detail of the sensitive inquiry is being scrutinized for clues to the possible involvement of Russia's secret services. At a previous hearing, a lawyer for Litvinenko's widow said it was vital that the inquest investigate "the criminal role of the Russian state."

On Friday, Davies said those behind the inquest would keep an open mind, referring to several competing theories about Litvinenko's death, including speculation that he may have killed in an accident, by Chechen-linked assassins, or by what Davies described as the "Spanish mafia."

Speaking to reporters after the hearing, widow Marina Litvinenko said she wasn't alarmed by the suggestion that the inquest would weigh each and every scenario.

"I just want to know the truth," she said.

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