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Document Declaring U.S.S.R. Dead Missing From Archives

By The Moscow Times

February 07, 2013

MINSK, Belarus — Former Belarussian leader Stanislav Shushkevich said a historic document that proclaimed the death of the Soviet Union is missing from archives.

Shushkevich discovered that the document was gone while working on his memoirs.

"It's hard to believe in the disappearance of such a high-level document, but this is a fact," Shushkevich said.

He said he believes the document was stolen, probably by someone with intentions of selling it to a collector.

Officials of Belarus and the Commonwealth of Independent States confirmed late Wednesday that they have only copies.

"We don't know where the original is," said Vasily Ostreiko, the head of the archive

department of the CIS, which is headquartered in the Belarussian capital.

The agreement's disappearance reflects the chaos that surrounded the Soviet demise.

On Dec. 8, 1991, Shushkevich hosted Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk for secret talks at a government hunting lodge near Viskuli, in the Belovezha Forest.

The trio signed a deal declaring that "the U.S.S.R. has ceased to exist as an entity of international law and geopolitical reality," defeating Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts to hold the country together.

The agreement also announced the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose alliance joined by nine other Soviet republics later that month. Gorbachev resigned on Dec. 25, 1991.

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