

Gazprom Co-Founder Rem Vyakhirev Dead at 78

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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Vyakhirev usually spoke his mind. **V.Volkov**

Rem Vyakhirev, the charismatic co-founder of Gazprom who successfully fought attempts to reform the gas monopoly, died in Moscow, the state controlled firm announced late Monday.

He was 78.

Vyakhirev was a career gas industry man who worked his way up the ranks to become first deputy minister of the U.S.S.R Gas Ministry. He played a key role in creating Gazprom together with his boss, future Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, who headed the ministry.

In 1992, after Chernomyrdin joined the government, Vyakhirev became the chairman of Gazprom, one of the most powerful official posts in the country.

Known for his conservative views on gas industry development Vyakhirev successfully fought

plans to reform the monopoly by acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, known for his liberal economic agenda. Reformer Anatoly Chubais became Vyakhirev's bitter enemy.

He called Chubais, an architect of Russian privatization, "the worst man for the Russian state" in a Forbes magazine interview, the only one he gave in the last 10 years.

"The pipeline shouldn't be divided between different masters, because everyone would pursue their own interests," Vyakhirev said in the interview.

While CEO, Vyakhirev laid out the Blue Stream route to transfer Russian gas under the Black Sea to Turkey. During his tenure at Gazprom, the company founded Wingas with Germany's Wintershallgas, allowing the Russian gas monopoly to establish a presence in Western Europe.

A colorful, heavyset man, Vyakhirev was also known for being outspoken.

In one newspaper interview he said that Turkmenistan "would be forced to eat sand" if it would not agree to sell gas to Russia under his conditions. Vyakhirev was supporting gas trader Itera, Gazprom's partner which was buying Turkmen gas at unfavorable conditions.

During negotiations in Turkmenistan in 2001, Vyakhirev was called the "the wildest wolf" by Turkmen leader Saparmurat Niyazov. He was forced by Niyazov to apologize for his statements about the country.

While presenting a letter from President Vladimir Putin to Niyazov during the visit Vyakhirev jokingly called Putin "still a young man," in a paternal manner.

Vyakhirev's influence was downgraded after Putin became president in 2000. In 2001 Putin replaced Vyakhirev with his own protégé, Alexei Miller — who had no experience in the gas industry prior to his being put in the role.

"He was the last gas man ruling the great gas industry of Russia. He knew his boundaries and he would not be the one to lay pipes bypassing Ukraine. He would negotiate without creating a loss for either country," said Dmitry Mosienko, an editor of Kiev-based Oil Market magazine who covered the industry since the mid 1990s.

Both Putin and Miller expressed their condolences following Vyakhirev's death.

Vyakhirev who was once included in Forbes magazine's rich list with a net worth of \$1.3 billion, said in 2012 that he still held \$13 million worth of Gazprom shares.

In the Forbes interview, Vyakhirev said he was developing his own animal farm, where he keeps 17 deer, as well as sheep, cows and pigs.

Vyakhirev is survived by his daughter Tatyana Vyakhireva, his son Yuri Vyakhirev and his brother Viktor Vyakhirev.

A wake for Vyakhirev will be held on Wednesday at the Central Clinical Hospital at 15 Ulitsa Marshal Timoshenko. He will be buried at the Vostraykovsky Cemetery in western Moscow.

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