

British Inquest Into Litvinenko's Death May Be Scrapped

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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LONDON — Britain's long-delayed inquest into the death by radioactive poisoning of former FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko could be abandoned after the coroner partly upheld a British government request to withhold crucial evidence.

Robert Owen, a senior judge acting as coroner, said that keeping some of the evidence secret would make it impossible to hold a "full, fair and fearless inquiry" into the death of the vocal critic of President Vladimir Putin.

Litvinenko, 43, died after drinking polonium-210, a radioactive isotope, that had been slipped into his tea at a London hotel in 2006. In a deathbed statement, he accused Putin of ordering his murder, a claim Russia has denied.

In a written ruling Friday, the coroner partially upheld a request by British Foreign Secretary William Hague to withhold evidence relating to the possible involvement of the Russian state

in Litvinenko's death and whether it could have been prevented.

The coroner also agreed to keep secret information that could undermine trust in the British government or "cause real harm to the UK's international relations."

Without being able to assess all the evidence in open hearings, Owen said he would be unable to "discharge my duty to undertake a full, fair and fearless inquiry into the circumstances."

Those involved have two weeks to respond and a further hearing is due on June 11.

Litvinenko's widow, Maria, said she was "utterly dismayed" by the ruling, which she described as a political fix to help Russia and Britain rebuild their relations.

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