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Zhirinovsky Wins Libel Case Against Gorbachev

By Anna Dolgov

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Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR)

Flamboyant Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky has won a libel suit against former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev who had accused him in a book of having advanced "extremist slogans" and having been involved in "provocations," the state-run TASS news agency reported Wednesday.

A Moscow city court has awarded Zhirinovsky 6,300 rubles ($93) for the "moral suffering" he has endured following the publication of Gorbachev's book last year, the report said. Zhirinovsky was seeking 1 million rubles.

The court also ordered Gorbachev to issue a refutation of his claims, but did not specify where it should be published — meaning that the former president's team was free to print a refutation in a small neighborhood newspaper, lawyers said, RBC news agency reported.

“We need to find some newspaper or publication, and print a refutation there,” Gorbachev's lawyer Alexander Makarov was quoted by RBC as saying. “It's not specified where it is to be published, how it is to be distributed.”

In his book, titled “After the Kremlin,” Gorbachev wrote that during the 1993 parliamentary election, many voters backed Zhirinovsky who “advanced extremist slogans.” Gorbachev also wrote he was attacked in 1996 in the Siberian city of Omsk, and said Zhirinovsky's political party “had a hand in this provocation,” TASS reported.

Zhirinovsky, a veteran politician who heads the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) and its faction in the lower house of parliament, is notorious for his non-politically correct and his insensitive remarks.

But while at the dawn of his political career in the early 1990s, some Russians feared Zhirinovsky could take over the country's helm as a nationalistic dictator, he later evolved to be seen by many as almost a comic relief in Russia's parliament — a jester who can mock and badger fellow politicians, while skirting the line of antagonizing the Kremlin.

He still manages to offend, however. In an incident that sparkled massive outrage, Zhirinovsky harangued a pregnant journalist during a press conference last year, and then suggested his assistant could rape her.

Some of the quotes attributed to Zhirinovsky from the political campaigns of the early 1990s — the time Gorbachev describes in his book — include a pledge that victorious Russian soldiers would “wash their boots in the Indian Ocean,” and a campaign promise that every Russian woman would get a man.

A couple of decades later, Zhirinovsky disowned the words, saying “there was never anything in the party program” about the Indian Ocean or about providing a man for every Russian woman, Lenta.ru news portal reported in 2011.

The words about soldiers' boots in the Indian Ocean seem to have originally appeared in a preface to Zhirinovsky's book “The Last Thrust South.”

The preface was signed by a history professor, but Zhirinovsky later claimed credit for saying those words himself, according to an interview with Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper published in 2003.

“Ten years ago, in the book 'The Last Thrust South,' I wrote about the need for Russia's military presence in the waters of the Indian Ocean,” Zhirinovsky was quoted as saying. “I didn't, of course, write it in as many words, but put it in a more simple way: A Russian soldier will wash his boots in the Indian Ocean.”

Recalling Russian-Indian naval exercises that took place in the region since the book was published, Zhirinovsky insisted in the interview that his prediction turned out to be correct.

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