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Ukrainian Separatist Yevgeny Zhilin Murdered in Moscow Restaurant

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Yevgeny Zhilin **Sergei Chuzavkov / AP**

The head of a
pro-Russian militant group operating in eastern Ukraine has been murdered
in an elite Moscow restaurant, Russian media reported Tuesday.

Yevgeny Zhilin was killed when an unknown man opened fire in the Veterok restaurant
in the prestigious
Gorki-2
complex in the Moscow suburbs on Monday night.
The shooter,
who had reportedly been waiting for
Zhilin and his friend inside the restaurant, escaped
from the scene, Russia's Interfax news agency reported.

Zhilin's companion, Andrei Kozyrev,

survived the shooting and has been hospitalized,
Interfax reported. The shooter's motives are still unclear, but Russia's Investigative Committee are looking into the theory it may have been part of a commercial dispute "with a rival in the security business."

Zhilin, 40, a former police officer, founded the pro-Russian Ukrainian organization Oplot in 2010. Originally a “fight club,” associated with underground business structures in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, the group went on to form a fundamental part of the so-called "Anti-Maidan" counter-movement to the Ukrainian EuroMaidan revolution in the winter of 2013-2014.

Many of its members were shown to have taken part in violent clashes against Maidan activists in Kiev. After Yanukovych’s ousting in February 2014, they also led assaults on pro-Ukrainian rallies in Kharkiv.

Zhilin and Oplot initially had the support of local Kharkiv authorities, but were Zhilin was forced to flee to Russia in the spring of 2014.

As the Ukrainian revolution morphed into military conflict in the east, a new Oplot franchise emerged in Donetsk, with many of its members fighting for pro-separatist forces against Ukrainian government forces. One of the new members of the Donetsk Oplot was Alexander Zakharchenko,
who later became head of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's
Republic.

Ukrainian law enforcement agencies had accused Zhilin of a number of crimes,
including
kidnapping and torture.

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