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Russia's Richest Woman Declared Fugitive in Libel Suit

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Yelena Baturina. **Yelena Baturina / Imago / TASS**

A Russian court has declared the country's richest woman a fugitive over her failure to appear in a criminal libel case, the RBC news website has reported.

Yelena Baturina, former Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov's widow, was reportedly sued by her brother's financial manager this fall. She is alleged to have defamed the manager in an Austrian court dispute between Baturina and her brother Viktor Baturin.

The court in Russia's republic of Kalmykia declared Baturina a fugitive after five failed attempts to secure her appearance in court, the RBC report said. The judge has suspended the libel case until her whereabouts are established, the report added.

Russian law allows defendants to be represented by third parties during misdemeanor hearings, RBC said, but the judge ruled that Baturina failed to explain why she herself could not appear in court.

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Baturina "did not show due diligence and foresight in exercising her procedural rights," judge Oksana Sevostyanova was quoted as saying.

Baturina, 56, plans to appeal the criminal libel lawsuit, her spokesman Gennady Terebkov told RBC.

The lawsuit was reportedly filed by Viktor Baturin's financial manager Erentsen Manzheyev in September. Manzheyev alleges that Baturina falsely claimed during a hearing in Vienna on Baturina's decade-old dispute with Baturin that Manzheyev was under criminal investigation, according to the RFE/RL news website.

Baturina's own arbitration court case to declare Manzheyev bankrupt is scheduled for Jan. 10, according to the court database cited by RBC.

Forbes magazine estimates Baturina's net worth at $1.2 billion.

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