

Ex-Belarus Leader Who Helped Dissolve Soviet Union Dies Aged 87

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Belarusian politician and scientist Stanislav Shushkevich. **Viktor Drachev / TASS**

Stanislav Shushkevich, the first leader of independent Belarus who played a key role in the [dissolution](#) of the Soviet Union, died Wednesday at age 87.

Shushkevich's wife [told](#) journalists her husband passed away in the Belarusian capital of Minsk as a result of Covid-19 complications. He was placed in [intensive care](#) last month.

"We hope that a state funeral will be organized, but no one has contacted us yet," Irina Shushkevich told AFP.

As chairman of the parliament of Soviet Belarus, Shushkevich hosted Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk for secret talks at a government hunting lodge in the Belovezha Forest in late 1991.

The trio came to an agreement behind the back of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, and signed a deal known as the Belovezha accords that declared "the U.S.S.R. has ceased to exist."

It was the final death knell for the Soviet Union, and Gorbachev resigned from his now-defunct position less than three weeks later.

The agreement also led to the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose alliance later joined by other former Soviet republics.

A physicist with no political experience, Shushkevich was persuaded to run for Belarus' first Congress of People's Deputies in 1989.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Shushkevich became the first leader of independent Belarus.

He was eventually succeeded by former collective farm chairman Alexander Lukashenko when the office of the president was established in 1994. Lukashenko remains the Belarusian president to this day.

Shushkevich was a [frequent critic](#) of Lukashenko, who has ruled the country with an authoritarian grip and orchestrated a sweeping clampdown on Belarusians who protested his disputed 2020 election victory.

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