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Deputy Head of Russian-Occupied Kherson Region Dies in Car Crash

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Kirill Stremousov **t.me/Stremousov_Kirill**

Updates with reaction and details.

Kirill Stremousov, the vocal deputy head of the Moscow-installed administration in the occupied Kherson region of Ukraine was killed Wednesday in an apparent car accident, according to local officials.

Stremousov, known for his strongly anti-Ukrainian rhetoric, died near the town of Henichesk, Russian pro-war blogger Semyon Pegov wrote on Telegram.

"Kirill was one of the brightest, he was able to speak and deliver to people the truth about what is happening in the Kherson region," the Russian-appointed head of Kherson, Vladimir Saldo, said in a video posted on his Telegram channel.

The most senior Russian-appointed official in occupied Ukraine to die since the start of the invasion, Stemousov, 45, had been sanctioned by both the U.S. and the European Union.

His death comes as Ukrainian forces press forward with an offensive on the Russian-held city of Kherson, from which Russia has evacuated thousands of civilians in recent weeks.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Wednesday ordered the retreat of Russian forces from Kherson and the entire right bank of the Dnipro River to defensive lines on the left bank.

Independent media outlet Meduza reported earlier Wednesday that Stremousov was one of a group of officials that the Kremlin had ordered should be quoted less frequently on state-run media outlets.

Few details about the accident were immediately available, but there have been a series of assassinations and attempted killings of Russian-appointed officials in occupied Ukraine since the start of Russia's invasion in February.

Related article: Russia Begins Kherson 'Evacuations' as Ukrainian Forces Advance

Stemousov's boss, Saldo, 66, a former Kherson mayor and local businessman, was transferred in August to a Moscow hospital after reportedly eating a meal prepared by a new cook. Russia's Defense Ministry said at the time he may have ingested a nerve agent.

While some of these killings are believed to have been carried out by partisans and the Ukrainian security services, experts have suggested that others could be the result of local political and economic disputes.

A father of five, Stemousov provided regular updates about the military situation in and around Kherson, which was until Wednesday the only remaining regional capital in Ukraine still under Moscow's control.

In a final Telegram post on Wednesday, Stremousov stated that the Ukrainian army was attacking in "all directions" in the Kherson region.

His prolific videos, interviews and posts on his Telegram channel — where he has over 120,000 subscribers — meant he was perhaps the most publicly recognizable face of the administrations installed by Russia in occupied Ukraine.

"The demise of Kirill Stremousov is a huge blow to Russia's occupation regime. The guy was odious, but a talented communicator," tweeted Nikolaus von Twickel, a political analyst focusing on eastern Ukraine.

Stremousov enjoyed a degree of notoriety in Kherson even before the war started, and faced a media backlash in 2017 after he filmed himself spinning his young daughter around his head by her legs. Two years later he was accused of attacking a local newspaper office with tear gas.

Stremousov ran unsuccessfully for the post of Kherson mayor and as a candidate in Ukraine's parliamentary elections before the Russian invasion, while during the coronavirus pandemic he became a prominent anti-vaxxer.

Stremousov was appointed the deputy head of the pro-Kremlin Kherson administration in

April following Russia’s partial occupation of the region the previous month.

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