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Senior Russian Official Dies After Privately Bemoaning 'Fascist' Invasion

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Russia's Deputy Science and Higher Education Minister Pyotr Kucherenko. **Sergei Bobylev / TASS**

Russia's Deputy Science Minister Pyotr Kucherenko has died months after a prominent journalist recalled him criticizing the invasion of Ukraine in private conversations.

Kucherenko, 46, fell seriously ill on board a flight returning from Cuba on Saturday, Russia's Science and Higher Education Ministry said Sunday.

The flight made an emergency landing in southern Russia but doctors who arrived onboard were unable to save the official.

Kucherenko's family linked his death to a heart condition but declined to elaborate pending a forensic examination scheduled for Wednesday, according to the state-run broadcaster Zvezda.

Roman Super, an award-winning independent journalist and documentary filmmaker, said he had spoken with Kucherenko in the minister's office "a few days" before the journalist left

Russia in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine last year.

The two reportedly discussed Super's relocation plans, Kucherenko's inability to leave Russia and his own opposition to Moscow's invasion.

"It's impossible [for me to leave Russia], they confiscate our passports. And there's no world that would be happy to see a deputy Russian minister after this fascist invasion," Super recalled Kucherenko saying.

According to Super, Kucherenko claimed to have taken "antidepressants and tranquilizers at the same time by the handful."

"It's not really helping. I don't sleep much. I feel terrible. We're all held hostage. No one can make a peep," he said.

"You can't imagine the degree of brutalization of our country. You won't even recognize Russia in a year."

Super did not say when exactly his conversation with Kucherenko took place. It is known that Super had left Russia for security reasons months after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

Kucherenko is survived by his wife, the pop singer Diana Gurtskaya, and their teenage son.

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