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Ex-Transportation Minister Found Dead With Gunshot Wound After Being Sacked by Putin

July 07, 2025



Roman Starovoit. **Alexei Danichev / TASS**

Former Transportation Minister Roman Starovoit was found dead on Monday in an apparent suicide, police investigators said, coming just hours after the Kremlin suddenly announced that President Vladimir Putin had dismissed him.

A spokeswoman from Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said Starovoit's body was found in his car parked in a Moscow suburb. The spokeswoman said that police investigators were "working at the scene to determine" the cause of death, adding that preliminary findings point to suicide.

Several news outlets published videos and photos from the scene of the apparent suicide in the upscale Odintsovo neighborhood, where many members of the Russian elite reside. In a video, police appeared to be recovering a body from bushes near a parking lot, while another showed a tow truck removing a Tesla reportedly said to be owned by Starovoit.

Unconfirmed reports in the Russian press suggested the ex-minister may have killed himself as early as last Friday. State Duma lawmaker Andrei Kartapolov further fueled speculation by telling reporters that the former minister had died "quite long ago."

Putin sacked Starovoit just over a year after appointing him, according to a decree published early Monday on the Kremlin's website. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov later dismissed claims that the ex-minister had fallen out of favor with Putin, but did not provide an explanation for his removal.

Starovoit was last seen in public on Sunday during a meeting with Transportation Ministry officials.

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Putin replaced Starovoit with Deputy Transportation Minister Andrei Nikitin, who will now serve as acting transportation minister. According to anonymous sources cited by the business newspaper Vedomosti, the decision to replace Starovoit was made "several months ago."

Later on Monday, the Kremlin published a video of the president meeting with Nikitin, telling the new appointee: "I hope you will apply all your energy, knowledge, skills and organizational abilities to tackle the critical challenges facing this sector."

Nikitin resigned as governor of the Novgorod region in February to assume the deputy role.

Putin had tapped Starovoit to lead the Transportation Ministry in May 2024 after he was elected as president for another six-year term. Before that, Starovoit served as governor of the southwestern Kursk region from 2018 to 2024.

His tenure as governor drew renewed scrutiny following Ukraine's surprise incursion into the Kursk region last August. Since then, law enforcement authorities have made several high-profile arrests, including that of his successor Alexei Smirnov, over the alleged misuse of public funds.

Smirnov and several others are accused of embezzling 1 billion rubles ($12.7 million) from the Kursk Region Development Corporation that was meant to be used for constructing defense fortifications along the border with Ukraine. The CEO of the corporation was arrested late last year.

While Starovoit had not been directly implicated in the ongoing police investigations, later on Monday, the Kommersant business newspaper cited unnamed sources as saying suspects in the embezzlement case, including Smirnov, recently testified against him.

Russian media previously reported that the breached border defenses, completed during Starovoit's time as governor, cost almost 15 billion rubles ($190 million) and took nearly three years to construct. Despite the large sums that went into building the fortifications, Ukrainian troops managed to rapidly seize large swaths of territory in the Kursk region, facing little resistance.

Political analyst Yevgeny Minchenko called Starovoit's dismissal "predictable," adding that "the Kursk region situation has caught up with him." Michenko also described Nikitin as a "conservative" candidate for his replacement.

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