The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Derk Sauer, Moscow Times Founder and Dutch Media Entrepreneur, Dies at 72

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Derk Sauer. **Semyon Katz**

Derk Sauer, the Dutch media entrepreneur who founded The Moscow Times, died on Thursday at age 72, his family said in a statement.

He died from injuries sustained in a sailing accident one month ago while on the water with his wife, Ellen Verbeek.

Born in Amsterdam, Sauer spent his youth as a leftist activist before becoming a journalist for Dutch newspapers and broadcasters. His reporting took him to conflict zones around the world including Northern Ireland and Cambodia.

In 1989, he and Verbeek moved to Moscow during the final years of the Soviet Union at the invitation of Dutch media company VNU to launch Moscow Magazine, the first glossy magazine in Russia.

“Many people thought we were crazy,” Sauer told the Dutch newspaper Het Parool. “But I’m a

journalist. The end of the Soviet regime was by far the most important societal development in my lifetime. If you can witness that firsthand, what more could you ask for?"

The Moscow Magazine project was ultimately unsuccessful, but Sauer stayed in Russia.

In 1992, he launched The Moscow Times as an English-language daily aimed at the growing expat community in post-Soviet Russia. Under his leadership, the paper became a trusted independent source of news for millions of readers inside and outside the country, and helped launch the careers of dozens of prominent journalists.

That same year, Sauer and his business partner Annemarie van Gaal founded Independent Media, which went on to publish the Russian editions of Cosmopolitan, Playboy, FHM, Harper's Bazaar, Good Housekeeping, Esquire and Men's Health.

In 1999, Sauer co-founded Vedomosti, one of the country's leading business newspapers, as a joint venture with the Financial Times and The Wall Street Journal.

He would also serve as director of RBC, another leading business publication, from 2012-2015. After RBC reported on President Vladimir Putin and his inner circle's appearance in the Panama Papers investigation, police raided its owner's offices and Sauer himself would be falsely accused of fraud.

A familiar face in Dutch media, Sauer wrote a regular column for the newspaper Het Parool and frequently appeared on Dutch television.

After selling The Moscow Times in 2005, he repurchased the publication in 2017 and relaunched it as a digital-only outlet.

Despite intensifying pressure on independent journalists, the newsroom continued operating from Moscow until March 2022, when Russia's wartime censorship laws forced Sauer and the staff to relocate to Amsterdam.

With Sauer's support, the independent broadcaster TV Rain (Dozhd) and journalists from the exiled Russian news outlet Meduza also relocated to Amsterdam, helping establish a hub for independent Russian media in exile.

In January 2025, he founded a music label for Russian and Belarusian musicians forced into exile for their dissent against their countries' regimes.

He is survived by his wife and their three sons.

"He dedicated his life to defending independent Russian media," his son Pjotr, a reporter for The Guardian and a former reporter for The Moscow Times, wrote on X. "In his final days, he asked that people continue to support the free press."

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