
KREMLIN CRITIC VORONENKOV KILLED IN KYIV

- 24.03.2017

Deutsche Welle (23 March 2017)

For the second time in less than a year, a prominent Kremlin critic has been assassinated in broad daylight in the Ukrainian capital. Denis Voronenkov, a Communist party member of the Russian parliament from 2011 to 2016, was shot dead on Thursday morning in front of a hotel in central Kyiv.

Voronenkov's bodyguard injured the assassin; he died a short time later in hospital. The police are calling it a contract killing. The case brings to mind that of prominent Russian journalist Pavel Sheremet, who died in July of last year when his car exploded in central Kyiv.

Witness against Yanukovych

Voronenkov, 45, was the most prominent among a group of Russian politicians and activists who have recently relocated to Ukraine. Unlike Sheremet, who had lived in Ukraine for years, he first came to Kyiv around six months ago, where he was given Ukrainian citizenship.

He was a key witness in a case against Viktor Yanukovych, Ukraine's former prime minister and later president, who fled to Russia in 2014. No details of his testimony have been released, but Ukrainian state prosecutor Yuri Lutsenko had described it as valuable. Voronenkov was due to testify again on Thursday. A treason trial against Yanukovych was due to begin in March but has been delayed. In an interview with the Ukrainian online newspaper Censor.Net, Voronenkov was sharply critical of the Russian leadership, and called the annexation of Crimea a "mistake that needs to be corrected." He also attracted attention for remarks he made during an interview with the Ukrainian broadcaster Hromadske TV. Voronenkov said that Vladislav Surkov, an influential advisor to President Vladimir Putin, had originally been a vocal critic of the annexation of Crimea.

Voronenkov had appeared in Ukrainian media as a vocal critic of Kremlin policies

In conflict with the FSB?

Voronenkov had long been part of the Russian elite. Despite its oppositional role, his Communist party is widely considered to be an unofficial Kremlin ally. Voronenkov received excellent military and legal training, and reportedly had good relations with the Russian police, army, and intelligence services. Before his career as a member of parliament, he headed up a narcotics agency, and by his own admission, uncovered corruption in Russia's federal security service, the FSB. Those revelations put him "in conflict" with powerful people, causing him to fear for his life, he told Censor.Net. He said he'd previously managed to survive an assassination attempt in Moscow in 2007.

Excluded from politics

Voronenkov said he had moved to Kyiv in order to avoid possible imprisonment after his immunity as an MP had expired. Voronenkov was being prosecuted in Russia on fraud charges to do with real estate dealings; his lawyer said he denied the charges. At the beginning of March, a court in Moscow issued a warrant for his arrest.

A fearless rebel: Second anniversary of Boris Nemtsov's murder

Voronenkov had moved to Ukraine together with his wife, the renowned opera singer Maria Maksakova. She had also served as a member of parliament for the pro-Kremlin United Russia party until the fall of 2016. For formal reasons, both were excluded from their parties after they fled to Ukraine.

Kaynak/Source: