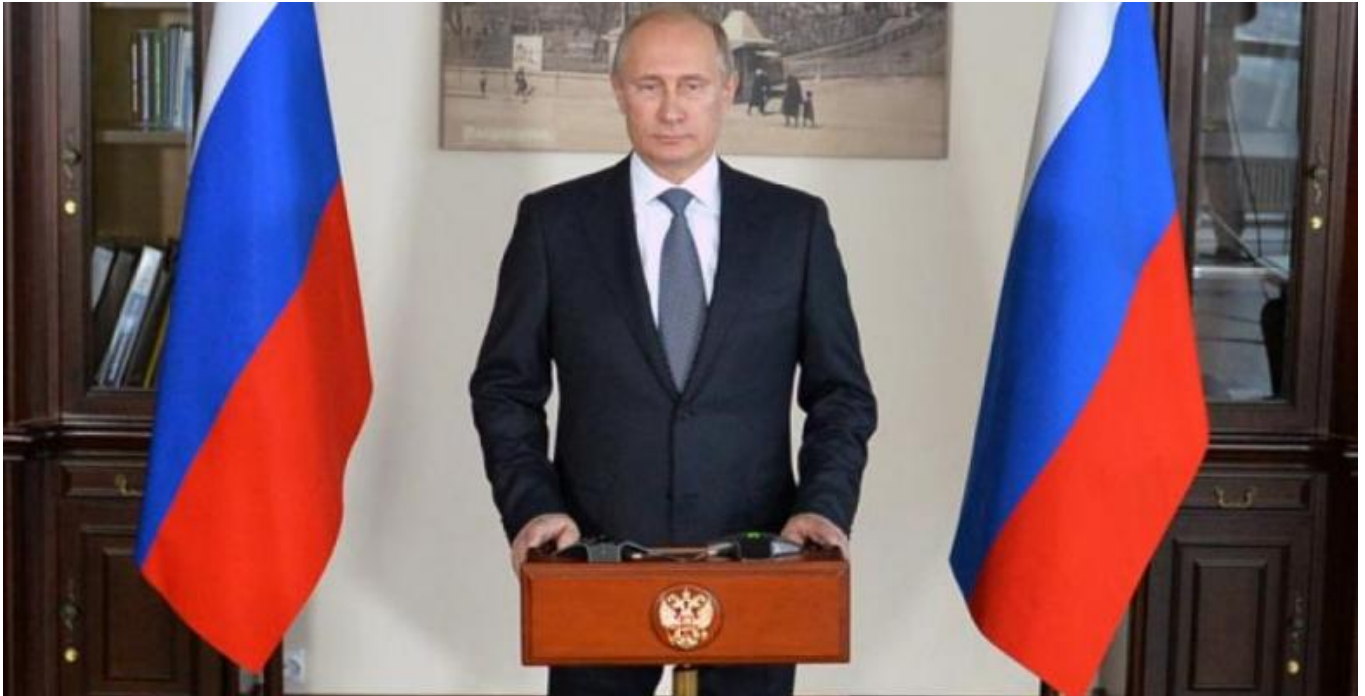


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**Russia Launches Hunt for Former 'Putin Banker'**

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Russian authorities accuse Sergei Pugachyov of stealing state money issued to support his now-defunct Mezhprombank during the 2008-2009 global financial crisis.

The 51-year-old was once viewed as a leader of a hawkish Kremlin clan that allegedly was responsible for the arrest and jailing of former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky a decade ago.

Pugachyov was, until June, also the majority owner of the French luxury food chain Hediard.

But he recently left Russia for an undisclosed location and has since been one of the most vocal critics of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his new circle of rich confidants.

Pugachyov told the Financial Times in October that "today in Russia there is no private property. There are only serfs who belong to Putin."

"Big business cannot live as before. It has to live under military rules," he added.

The comments represented a sharp contrast to charges from critics that Pugachyov was one of the instigators of Russia's nationalization campaign launched shortly after Putin first became President in 2000.

He was thought to be behind the arrest of Khodorkovsky, whose Yukos oil empire was then dismantled and its most lucrative business swallowed up at a large discount by the state firm Rosneft.

Interpol's official website states that Pugachyov is "wanted by the judicial authorities of Russia for prosecution".

It also requests that those who know his whereabouts contact the agency but does not explicitly request his arrest.

Various countries have different rules about how to proceed should they locate a person wanted by Interpol.

Pugachyov's appearance on the agency's "red notice" list means that some European countries must either detain him pending a domestic court case or book him and release him on bail.

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