

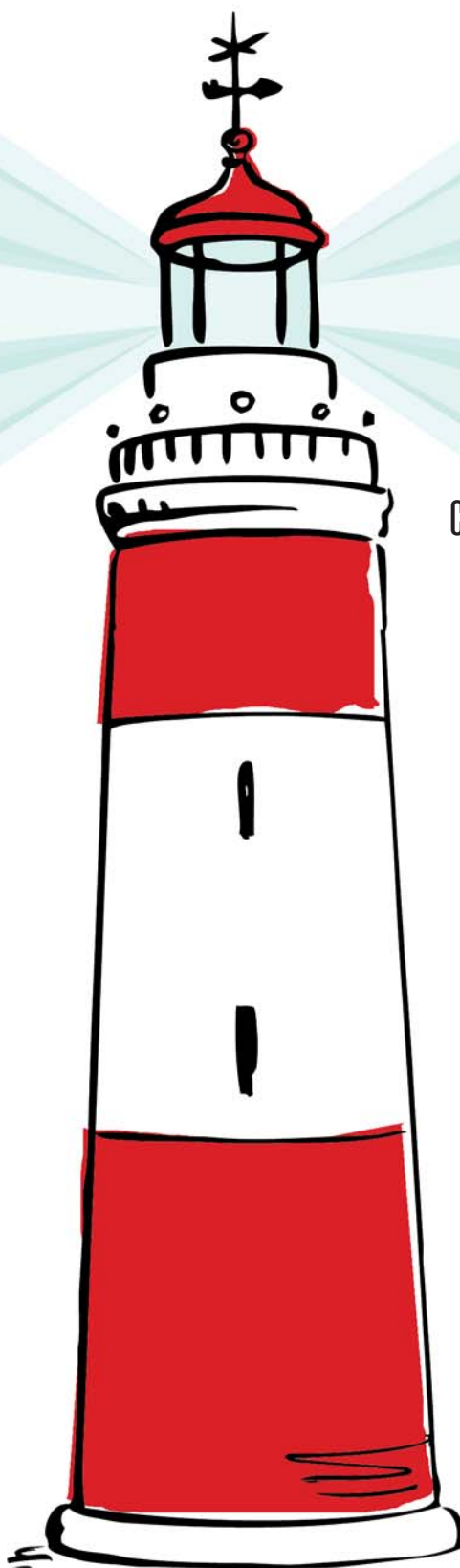
# *Your* interfax

SPECIAL ISSUE



## HOW WE WERE STARTING UP AND HOW THEY WERE TRYING TO SHUT US DOWN

dramatic episodes  
in Interfax's history



## October 1993: AN INTERFAX CORRESPONDENT AS A PEACEMAKER

### IT CAN'T BE TRUE!

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INTERFAX INFORMATION SERVICES INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION GROUP

**interfax**

# Dear Friends,

## Interfax has turned 20

Interfax's 20 years have coincided with a new period in the history of Russia. It is a time that has seen radical changes in the country's government system, in its politics, economy and arts, in the lives of people, and in its society as a whole.

Interfax itself has changed during these years as well, significantly enlarging the scale and geography of its activities.

Today's Interfax is a group of 36 companies, the recognized leader of the Russian information market, and an agency that, without exaggeration, enjoys a high reputation throughout the world.

Yet it is no less important to mention in what respects Interfax has remained unchanged.

We are not embarrassed to read news we have written over these 20 years because from the very outset we have sought to achieve the highest standards of independent journalism, speed, accuracy and objectivity of reporting, and to have information provided to us on an exclusive basis.

Despite the storms of the past years, Interfax has never abandoned these principles, nor has it lost its desire always to be the first to report the most important news, find out details of events, and obtain various opinions on them.

Interfax has made its name on events that have produced revolutionary changes – the "500 Days" program of liberal economic reforms, the abortive coup in August 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the withdrawal of Russian strategic missiles from Ukraine and Belarus, the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the war in Chechnya, the Georgian aggression against South Ossetia. All these events, which our newswire was the first to report, are history today.

These events have not only changed our country but have made our customers want new types of information as well. Having started out as a political news agency, Interfax has gone far beyond the limits of news journalism and today provides practically all types of business information, information that banks, companies and investors need for their market activities.

But despite the diversity of our business, our goal is to meet the high standards in every field, and we verify our information rigorously as our top priority.

In this issue of the "Your Interfax" bulletin, we tell you how Interfax has developed its principles and standards and what initial steps it took along its 20-year path.

*Your Interfax*

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# How we were starting up and how they were trying to shut us down

## dramatic episodes in Interfax's history



Mikhail Komissar,  
Chairman of the Board of  
Directors of Interfax Group

Interfax, the first independent news agency in the USSR, appeared in July 1989 when perestroika and glasnost were gaining momentum, although arguments over the precise date continue.

Mikhail Komissar and several other journalists working for Radio Moscow, the foreign service of the USSR State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, succeeded in pushing their superiors to agree not to obstruct the development of a non-core product and assign ... just one room for this.

By pure chance the enthusiasts came across a report in the popular "Nauka i Zhizn" ("Science and Life") magazine about new technologies which enabled Interfax to circumvent the monopoly of the state news agency TASS with its giant network of teletype machines.

Mikhail Komissar, the Interfax Group founder and all-time chief, relates the landmark events of the first years in the agency's life.

### Glasnost, perestroika and the TV and Radio Committee

The policy of glasnost and other changes in the country were the objective reasons for the agency's establishment. Many things had become possible – the feeling was really in the air. The weeklies "Ogonyok" and "Argumenty i Fakty" that attracted the reader with their interesting and topical articles were at the very height of their incredible popularity. Independent publications cropped up. Meanwhile, television, radio and the country's only news agency TASS remained under the absolute control of the supreme authority – the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party – due to their influence on the masses. Radio Moscow, where we worked in the information section, was no exception. So while the entire nation was absorbed by the articles of Vitaly Korotich, chief editor of the popular weekly "Ogonyok", we had plenty of interesting information which could not be used.

At that time I was deputy chief editor of the main information section of Radio Moscow with some 200 subordinates. The main information section was a key unit that made the core information products for broadcasting to all countries of the world. For instance, we compiled so-called hourly news bulletins with me being responsible for covering developments in the USSR (the other deputy chief editor oversaw world news).

I received a great deal of information, which was rigorously censored. Yegor Ligachyov, the Politburo member who oversaw the TV and Radio Committee, would often call our bosses, and we would be told from the very top: "Comrade Ligachyov permitted... prohibited... recommended..."

In general, glasnost in the country as a whole and the lack of it at the TV and Radio Committee was an objective reason for the emergence of an independent news agency.

Another factor was the abundance of very interesting, juicy information that we had at hand but which remained unused as it did not fit the criteria according to which information was selected for our news bulletins.

## How it all began or Yakovlev's "Blessing"

Strange as it would seem, what really triggered Interfax's establishment was... an invitation to a reception at the Indian embassy. There I got into conversation with foreign diplomats who asked me why we were not making transcripts of our broadcasts as was the custom at many radio stations around the world. Very interesting things are happening in your country now, they said, but it is not always possible to hear a specific discussion with an expert, political analyst or sociologist. Now, if you were to release hard copies as well, we could even buy them, the diplomats assured me.

That was the catalyst. But it took two years to launch the project. I did the rounds of the relevant authorities explaining, trying to persuade them, finding additional arguments. I alone was consumed by my idea and against me was a whole system without the authorization of which I could do nothing.

Finally I got this authorization. How? Once I came to Alexander Yakovlev, the closest associate of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev at the time, and actually the second most important person in the Soviet Communist Party, to interview him. At the end of the conversation over tea and bagels, I said: "There is an idea in the air – to explain what perestroika is all about to foreigners. They don't understand a thing. We would write for them, translate – in a word make it easier for them to grasp." Yakovlev, already immersed in his papers and having almost forgotten about my presence replied: "Well, not bad."

I came to the TV and Radio Committee deputy chairman beaming, and told him that Yakovlev had given his approval. Shaken, he called the chairman. However, neither of these officials could call Yakovlev, a member of the party's Politburo, to ask whether it was true or not!... Ultimately they gave up and the project was launched.

For better or for worse, making money was not my motive. I was making a good career for myself, earning a good salary, traveling abroad on behalf of the TV and Radio Committee. But I was bored.

In those days, regrettably, probably nobody could think in terms of business logic. In a sense this helped us, but in some respects it was a hindrance.

The people who went into business three-to-five years later started dealing with oil and banking – generally serious things. And we had no opportunity to engage in big business at that moment and did not even think of it.

## The secret behind the name

The first joint ventures started mushrooming in the late 1980s. We as radio journalists were invited to various meetings and presentations and I got the idea of asking money for our project from the new businessmen. I talked to a dozen very self-satisfied directors. But all of them rejected my idea: "There is TASS, there is "Pravda". What else can you dream up?"

However, one day I attended a presentation by the Soviet-French-Italian joint venture Interquadro that was led by Lev Weinberg, a wise and interesting person capable of thinking in global terms. I approached him, and suggested labeling all our products "in conjunction with Interquadro" in exchange for "material support". I remember that when I said I needed merely \$20,000 he couldn't help grinning.

The policy of glasnost and other changes in the country were the objective reasons for the agency's establishment. Many things had become possible – the feeling was really in the air. Another factor was the abundance of very interesting, juicy information that we had at hand but which remained unused



We devised the following business pattern – to supply our customers with inexpensive fax machines, charge rent and simultaneously offer a package of our information

Weinberg agreed to support the idea in principle but insisted on getting a detailed plan of the project. When the information dissemination pattern was being mulled I first thought of setting up a courier service of some fifty messengers who would deliver news bulletins to customers in the mornings.

But Weinberg had his own doubts about Russian lack of discipline, about the cumbersome and cost-intensive nature of the model: “Someone will oversleep, someone will get drunk, someone will forget and the clients will be frustrated.” At the time only TASS had teletype machines and there was no Internet in Russia yet. The problem of distribution was becoming the key issue and clearly stood in the project’s way...

Luckily, an article in the then popular “Nauka i Zhizn” magazine on a new technology – text transmission via fax machines – caught my eye. Interquadro was familiar with the latest means of communications. “I have two of them,” Weinberg told me proudly when I rushed to him showing the article. “Why not? It may work, though I have never used them,” he remarked. And immediately we did a test run, sending a page of text by fax from one room to another. It was nothing short of a miracle – the text came out the way it originally looked.

After lengthy deliberation it was decided to send information to customers by fax machines which were only just appearing in the world. There were only a handful of them in the USSR – mainly at foreign companies and embassies which we assumed would become our first customers (later we had great difficulty in getting their numbers). Hence we devised the following business pattern – to supply our customers with inexpensive fax machines, charge rent and simultaneously offer a package of our information.

This is the form our agency first assumed – a joint venture of Radio Moscow and Interquadro – and we became the first company in the USSR not only to provide information services but also to supply fax machines. But we did not exist as a legal entity yet. We were

**M. Komissar in the first Interfax office at the State TV and Radio (Gosteleradio) building in 1989**



FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE

merely some sort of staff. Radio Moscow and Interquadro divided the money between themselves. We were paid a small, token salary.

The name was also born at that time, the beginning of summer 1989. I remember sitting and thinking different options over. I wanted something catchy and up-to-date. The first joint ventures with international partners were in fashion at the time, and all of them had such striking names with the prefix "inter": Interquadro, Intermicro etc. So, given the facsimile technology that had fascinated me, it dawned upon me: Interfax!

### First steps

We became profitable in literally a few months. The monthly subscription fee was \$17. I still cannot understand why. Apparently \$20 seemed too much and \$15 disappointingly low. With the exchange rates of those days, when a \$50 salary was considered quite fair for a journalist, 100 subscribers would guarantee us a decent life. The simplest fax machine was quite cheap and paid for itself in about half a year.

With the first subscription money we bought several additional computers, and started paying bigger salaries to journalists who had previously worked out of pure interest. After a year we already boasted seven or eight computers. We had several fax machines, a 30 sq.m room, about 10 permanent technical staff members (typists, fax machine operators), and Radio Moscow journalists working under contract.

Our clientele was growing fast. After some three or four months we had close to 100 subscribers. Each of them was paying \$17, making it \$1,700 a month, which was fantastic money those days. But none of it reached us. We weren't complaining, though – we were completely satisfied with the arrangement, we were so interested!

Sometime at the beginning of 1990 the foreign media started quoting us. Many leading world publications had taken out subscriptions. I remember that Reuters did not subscribe to our news for a very long time. They said they wanted to see how successful we would get. They received our information free of charge for about a year, after which we told them they would either have to pay or the service would be cut off.

Incidentally, we did not even think of supplying information to the domestic market, to our domestic mass media. Today many people will probably not understand why, but in those days the internal enemy was regarded to be worse than the foreign.

We were allowed to report news to the West, but the main thing was that our own people would not read our heresy because we were expressing a different viewpoint, reporting things that neither "Izvestia", nor "Pravda" wrote about those days.

### War of ideologies

So we very quickly became popular and consequently dangerous for various ideological bosses.

Interfax started facing problems in the middle of 1990. At approximately the same time, a deep rift occurred in Gorbachev's entourage. An extremely conservative wing was gaining momentum in the leadership of the USSR represented by Ligachyov, Kryuchkov, Polozkov and others. They could not remain indifferent onlookers to the growing flow of uncontrolled information. The people at the Communist Party Central Committee who sympathized with us (Alexander Yakovlev, Yevgeny Primakov, Arkady Volsky) warned us that they would be unable to cover our backs. They were having tough times themselves – a very fierce struggle was under way between liberals and conservatives.

For better or for worse, making money was not my motive. I was bored. The people who went into business three-to-five years later started dealing with oil and banking – generally serious things. And we had no opportunity to engage in big business at that moment and did not even think of it

We did not even think of supplying information to the domestic market, to our domestic mass media. Today many people will probably not understand why, but in those days the internal enemy was regarded to be worse than the foreign

The TV and Radio Committee remained under the strict control of Ligachyov, therefore the situation was extremely complicated for us. By that time we had become a communication channel for the liberals from the Politburo, who gladly shared their thoughts and ideas with us and responded to the events in the country and abroad through us.

The bosses summoned me almost daily and told me on no uncertain terms that if I did not leave in good time, I would be expelled from the Communist Party. Pressure began on my subordinates, technical staff were being fired. All Radio Moscow correspondents in the localities were called and told not to cooperate with us, not to report anything to us. The pressure was very strong.

Apparently what irritated the authorities most was that we had started running Baltfax, a joint newswire with the Baltic News Service, on a daily basis. Reports from the Baltic republics, which were rapidly developing into a hot spot, were related in seconds, quoted by numerous media and....driving the party bosses mad.

The agency was subjected to nine inspections in the space of a year. They picked at us like Jesuits and checked absolutely everything: fire safety, the observation of labor legislation, accounting documents etc. All this when all we had was one room, a dozen technical staff and two dozen radio journalists doing a second job for peanuts!

By the end of the year the pressure had increased, and it became clear that a showdown was on the cards.

TV and Radio Committee bosses of varying ranks were telling us straight: you'll end up in a bad way, shut yourselves down before they do it for you. But here they met their match. We no longer wanted to shut down.

The Interquadro leadership changed at the same time. L. Weinberg, who had been our supporter, left the company. The new owners wanted to make money quietly, without getting into any trouble with the authorities. Nothing else interested them. And they told us very quickly that they wished to have no part in our games. The French sent a letter to say they were discontinuing their involvement in the publication. The chief editor of our section told me straight up that he would be unable to help us out and signed a letter of withdrawal too.

However, the first Soviet law "On the Printed Press" had already been passed by that time. It stated that the staff of a media outlet or its chief editor had the right to establish a media outlet bearing the same name, if the founder stopped a publication.

In autumn 1990, realizing that we had only ourselves to rely on, I took advantage of that law and came to the Russian press and information minister, Mikhail Poltoranin.

I will never forget how, when I told him that the Central Committee wanted to close us down, Poltoranin, a close associate of Boris Yeltsin, who was the head of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet at the time, grinned sardonically: "We'll show them." He sat at his typewriter, typed the necessary words into the form, took the ministry stamp out of his trouser pocket and slammed it onto the document. "They'll change their tune now!" he told me gleefully, as he saw me out.

The entire registration process took some ten minutes. We were registered as a printed publication but not as a legal entity. Later, after much difficulty, we succeeded in getting registered as a limited liability company as well.

The biggest problem was that we simply did not have the money. Under the law of those days the minimum charter capital of a limited liability company was 50,000 rubles. Half of the sum had to be paid at the time of registration and the second half at the end of the first year. That is we had to have at least 25,000 rubles and I had only 3,000 on my savings account. I withdrew the entire sum – to my wife's horror – and started looking for potential partners.



I approached virtually everyone I knew. Several colleagues from Radio Moscow agreed to join but many others refused. "You'd better pay our wages on time, we don't want to be capitalists," these wary people said. Such were the times.

However, we finally managed to scrape 25,000 rubles together and got registered as a LLC.

### Why Interfax marks Independence Day on January 11

It was inevitable that we would part ways with the TV and Radio Committee, where we continued to share premises and remained staff members (at Interfax we were second-job employees). We were openly told that our days were numbered.

The Board of the TV and Radio Committee held a session on January 11, 1991 to discuss "the wrecking anti-party activities of Interfax and its head M. Komissar".

The discussion lasted for three hours, during which the then chairman of the TV and Radio Committee Leonid Kravchenko, his obliging deputies and party activists gave me a thrashing. It was a classical show trial with rhetoric to match: "Mikhail Komissar is playing into enemy hands" etc. As a result it was decided to put a stop to our damaging operations immediately. It must be said that in the morning of that day, foreseeing the worst, we had sent advance notice to all of our clients that if there would be no more sign of us, it meant that we had been closed down.

Some one hundred foreign correspondents were swarming outside of the TV and Radio Committee building that night. Never in my life have I given so many interviews as that day. The clampdown on Interfax became the second most important piece of international news. News from the Baltic republics where the situation was escalating was number one.

The most popular TV show of those days "Vzglyad" had been stopped several days earlier. Now it was our turn. All international TV channels, agencies and newspapers regarded it as key news, illustrating the predicament of Gorbachev and his supporters.

The agency was subjected to nine inspections in the space of a year. They picked at us like Jesuits and checked absolutely everything: fire safety, the observation of labor legislation, accounting documents etc. All this when all we had was one room, a dozen technical staff and two dozen radio journalists doing a second job for peanuts!

## FROM WORLD MEDIA REPORTS



**Interfax, a new and well-connected news-gathering service, has provided far more objective coverage than then the state-run news agency Tass since it began a year ago. Many foreign news bureaus here have come to rely on Interfax for quick and accurate accounts of closed government meetings and for reports from the various Soviet republics.**

**Mikhail Komissar, the director of Interfax, said that four officials from Gosteleradio and several police officers arrived at the agency's office in Radio Moscow building and impounded much of its equipment. He said that although Interfax became independent last September, the officials were claiming ownership of its equipment and hard-currency profits.**

**Komissar, however, added that the officials made it clear that they were making the move because they objected to Interfax's editorial content.**

**Washington Post, January 11, 1991**

**An Interfax spokesperson said by telephone that officials of Gosteleradio arrived at the offices in Radio Moscow building and switched off all machinery.**

**An agency statement sent to subscribers just before the switch-off said Interfax management saw the move as part of a deliberate policy "of liquidating independent information structures".**

**Toronto Star, January 12, 1991**

A.Volsky, Head of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE), and M. Komissar at the Interfax Central Office in Moscow, 1995



The Board of the TV and Radio Committee held a session on January 11, 1991 to discuss “the wrecking anti-party activities of Interfax and its head M. Komissar”

Unable to cope with such foreign media pressure the Soviet propaganda machine responded in its usual manner. The day after the shutdown and in response to the fuss that the foreign media had stirred, the anchor read out a statement on the prime time evening news show “Vremya”: “In relation to a wave of rumors the USSR TV and Radio Committee states that Interfax operations have been recognized to be wrong, the relevant authorities will deal with the agency and its head Mikhail Komissar...” Can you imagine what such a statement on “Vremya”, the main state television news program, meant in those days?

My mother immediately called me from Kharkiv: “Mikhail, that’s it. You’ll go to jail.”

But at that moment some sort of rage mounted in me, the determination to prove – I will carry on in spite of you all, you bastards. After all I realized that what we had been doing was interesting and strategically correct, that social evolution could not be stopped. I was pressured for a year in minor ways, including power cuts, and on a larger scale. This only fuelled my anger – they wouldn’t have their way!

We were kicked out of Radio Moscow in one day in violation of the Labor Code and other rules with all journalists being fired without a formal explanation. They tried to confiscate our property too, but my threats to go to court and have all damage deducted from the salaries of the TV and Radio Committee’s financial bosses worked. We were given one night to remove all the equipment and archives.

However, there was the problem of where all that could be moved to. Somewhere we could be left alone. We had established a good relationship with Gorbachev’s close associate Arkady Volsky (in 1991 – the president of the USSR Scientific-Industrial Union), a thoroughly decent and intelligent man who later became the head of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. I am grateful to Volsky not only for helping us out with premises but also for directly protecting us from the pressure of powerful figures (belonging to the top three in the country). Boris Yeltsin also allowed us to move to the RSFSR Supreme Soviet. In a word,

FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE

for half a year we, already a legal entity, operated at two locations – with Volsky at the Scientific-Industrial Union and with Yeltsin at the Supreme Soviet.

Volsky told my tormentors in my presence – I would often sit in his office – that he was opposed to shutting down Interfax, that the agency would stay under his wing and that those who would try to stand in the way would be dealing with him personally. He instilled some fear in those around him. As for Yeltsin, nobody simply dared to tell him anything. So gradually we were left alone.

And despite all the turmoil of January 11 we disrupted our news flow to our subscribers for less than 24 hours.

Ever since, Interfax has marked January 11 as its independence day – our main corporate holiday.

### Coup leaders versus SPRINT

When on August 19, 1991 the coup leaders declared they were seizing power, they introduced censorship, stopped the operations of many media organizations and turned off international telephone lines. Nevertheless, Interfax reports reached foreign customers unhindered.

The thing is that in 1990, Interfax had joined the SprintNet global network to deliver information to its foreign subscribers in electronic form.

However, apparently neither the leaders of the abortive coup, nor the KGB knew anything about the network, and it continued to function while regular telephone contact with the rest of the world was disrupted.

As a result, during the most dramatic time of the coup, Interfax was almost the only source of information about the developments in Moscow and other Soviet cities.

Our office in the United States that had been opened shortly before the coup attempt sent all reports coming from Moscow by fax to all the U.S. media and to the White House. On the third day of the crisis the news became so hot that our journalists had to read it to U.S. administration officials by telephone as they did not have time to wait by the fax machine.

Some one hundred foreign correspondents were swarming outside of the TV and Radio Committee building that night. Never in my life have I given so many interviews as that day. The clampdown on Interfax became the second most important piece of international news. News from the Baltic republics where the situation was escalating was number one

### FROM WORLD MEDIA REPORTS



**With an aggressive group of young and dedicated reporters, Interfax has revolutionized coverage of the Soviet Union and has had many major scoops such as last summer's birth of the 500-day economic plan to make the Soviet Union a market economy.**

**Interfax, which has introduced speed to Soviet Union journalism, has well-connected correspondents at the federal parliament and those of the republics, and they race to the telephone with breaking news along with their Western counterparts.**

**UPI, January 11, 1991**

**Leonid P. Kravchenko, the newly appointed chairman of Gosteleradio, ordered the phone lines cut at the old Interfax offices and "now he wants to close our rooms" at Moscow Radio, Interfax director Komissar said.**

**Komissar said "the main problems are political".**

**Some Soviet lawmakers have publicly expressed anger that the news agency last week reported defense budget figures before they were approved by the legislature.**

**Associated Press, January 11, 1991**

**INTERFAX EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENT, JANUARY 11, 1991**

The management of the USSR State Committee for TV and Radio Broadcasting (USSR Gosteleradio), led by its Chairman Leonid Kravchenko, ruled on January 11 to terminate Interfax's operations at the Gosteleradio building. Kravchenko ordered that all property belonging to Interfax in the building be confiscated.

Interfax was established as an independent news agency by Moscow Radio's main news desk (a Gosteleradio department) and the Soviet-French-Italian joint venture Interquadro in September 1989. Interfax became an independent news agency and was legally registered with the Information Ministry of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in September 1990.

As the new premises that Moscow City Executive Committee provided to Interfax on a long-term lease contract are still under renovation, Interfax is still occupying several small rooms inside the Gosteleradio building on Pyatnitskaya Street.

Interfax is convinced that its conflict with Gosteleradio has nothing to do with finances or property. The equipment in question is owned by Interfax and is the agency's legally registered property. We are prepared to vindicate our rights in court.

Interfax views the move by Gosteleradio's new leadership as the logical continuation of Leonid Kravchenko's policy of eradicating independent information organizations in Russia. The recent closure of the most popular Soviet TV program Vzgl'yad and Author Television programs are links of the same chain. Gosteleradio's leadership does not conceal the fact that Interfax's information does not comply with its political approach.

Interfax will continue its operations as long as it has technical resources to do so. If our subscribers stop receiving Interfax bulletins, this will mean that we are deprived of these resources. If this happens, Interfax will resume its operations immediately after moving into a new building. We apologize to you in advance for the forced stoppage and hope for your understanding.

Interfax wants all its subscribers to know that the only person who can block this plan is Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, who appointed Kravchenko to his job. Your appeals directly to him will provide us with much needed help at this hard time. We urge you to join our campaign to show your support.

**interfax**  
ИНТЕРФАКС**ЭКСТРЕННОЕ ЗАЯВЛЕНИЕ  
"ИНТЕРФАКСА"****11 января 1991.**

Руководство Гостелерадио СССР во главе с Председателем Леонидом Кравченко приняло 11 января решение о прекращении деятельности агентства "Интерфакс" в помещениях здания Гостелерадио. Л. Кравченко распорядился арестовать все принадлежащее "Интерфаксу" имущество, которое находится в здании Гостелерадио.

Напомним, что "ИФ" был создан как независимое агентство в сентябре 1989 года. Его учредителями стали Главная редакция Информации Московского Радио (одно из подразделений Гостелерадио) и советско-франко-итальянское предприятие "Интерквадро". В сентябре 1990 г. "ИФ" выделился в самостоятельное информационное агентство и был зарегистрирован в соответствии с Законом в Министерстве печати и массовой информации РСФСР.

Поскольку в новых помещениях, которые были предоставлены агентству в долгосрочную аренду Мосгорисполкомом, в настоящее время продолжается ремонт, "Интерфакс" по-прежнему занимает несколько небольших комнат в здании Гостелерадио СССР на ул. Пятницкой, 25.

"Интерфакс" убежден, что причинами сегодняшнего конфликта с Гостелерадио СССР являются не финансовые и имущественные претензии. Оборудование, о котором идет речь, принадлежит "Интерфаксу" и является юридически оформленной собственностью агентства. Это право мы готовы оспаривать в судебном порядке.

"Интерфакс" рассматривает эту акцию нового руководства Гостелерадио СССР как логическое развитие взятого Леонидом Кравченко курса на ликвидацию независимых информационных структур. Недавнее запрещение популярнейшей советской телепрограммы "Взгляд", исчезновение с экранов передач "Авторского телевидения" - звенья той же цепи. Руководство Гостелерадио СССР и не скрывает, что информация "Интерфакса" не отвечает его политической концепции.

"Интерфакс" будет продолжать работу до тех пор, пока для этого будут оставаться технические возможности. Если вы, наши подписчики, перестанете получать выпуски "ИФ", значит, нас лишили этих возможностей. Если это случится, "Интерфакс" возобновит свою деятельность сразу же после переезда в новое помещение. Мы заранее просим извинить нас за вынужденную приостановку и надеемся на ваше понимание.

"Интерфакс" обращается ко всем своим подписчикам. Помощь осуществлению намеченной акции может только тот, кто назначил Л. Кравченко на его пост - Президент СССР М. Горбачев. Ваши обращения непосредственно к нему могут оказать нам неоценимую помощь в трудный час. Мы призываем вас к акции журналистской солидарности и поддержки.





Interfax was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize which is probably the most prestigious award in journalism and literature in the United States, for its coverage of the events of August 1991.

### How Interfax got its charter

In the late 1980s-early 1990s, when Interfax started operating, the fundamentally new standards of Soviet and later Russian news reporting were actually shaped. Relying on international experience, of course.

At Radio Moscow we were used to adapting information for the international audience because we read the reports of foreign news agencies (Reuters, AFP, AP, EFE and others) in the original, knew the standards and traditions of foreign news reporting. Interfax placed its bets on these from the very outset. And these standards, based on the principles of independence, impartiality and reliability, differed significantly, I would say radically from the rules of Communist Party journalism and Soviet propaganda.

I want to reiterate that for Russian journalism in those days this was an absolutely innovative approach, as we might say today.

And, of course, we wanted to open up one more channel for distributing alternative information, uncensored news, wanted to expand the framework of glasnost, transform it once and for all into civilized freedom of the press.

Here we should recall the situation in the field of domestic news reporting. TASS played the solo part in it. In general I have respect for this organization. It is a big entity that has traveled a long road. It used to have and still has many wonderful people working for it. But in those days its goals did not include prompt and coherent reporting.

TASS reports would say something like this: "The General Secretary of the CC of the CPSU met with the US Secretary of State. Issues of mutual interest were raised at the meeting. The US Secretary of State confirmed the well-known position of the American side regarding missiles in Europe. To this M. Gorbachev said that the USSR has fought and will continue fighting for peace throughout the world and will never permit..." And so on.

This gibberish was driving readers in the West mad, nobody could understand a thing.

What Interfax did was describe the same subject but in an understandable way: "Gorbachev met Shultz. The meeting focused on differences over the deployment of Pershing missiles in Europe. Americans continue to insist that they will not dismantle their bases in

Interfax was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, which is probably the most prestigious award in journalism and literature in the United States, for its coverage of the events of August 1991

## FROM WORLD MEDIA REPORTS

**Valentina Lantseva, Russian President Boris Yeltsin's spokeswoman, told a news conference that Yeltsin met Friday with Interfax chief Mikhail Komissar, and told him "we would be ready to take under our wings Interfax, "Vzglyad", and others who want to walk free.**

**"We consider the closing of Interfax more or less in the same line as what happening now in Lithuania. This is an expression of the general line, to suppress", Ms. Lantseva said.**

**Komissar said he was told that Interfax could move its operations to the Russian Federation government building.**

**The news agency, founded in September 1989, resumed operations Saturday from offices borrowed from the League of Scientific and Industrial Associations, Komissar said.**

**Associated Press, January 1, 1991**





Some ten years ago the Interfax Board approved the agency's Charter, the principles of which we strictly abide by to this day. Interfax, the Charter says, shall not permit its information to be used for lobbying the interests of any group of people, organization or company, for covert or overt political or commercial advertising

Germany and Turkey. The USSR declares that this approach does not suit it and that it is ready to respond with countermeasures and deploy its missiles in neighboring territories. But nobody would gain from that. Therefore the Soviet leader is suggesting the following options."

After receiving two or three such reports the customer promptly concluded that it was worth subscribing to this information. Its quality depended entirely on the professional skills of our staff, of course, but these skills were very high. Before that there had not really been anything like it in the USSR and it was not difficult at all for us to compete in this with the Soviet printed press.

We regard the principles of news reporting on which the operations of our agency rely to be a key element of our success.

Some ten years ago the Interfax Board approved the agency's Charter, the principles of which we strictly abide by to this day.

"We respect the right of the public to know truthful information and shall do everything we can for this information to become accessible to it," the Charter says. "All this requires constant and uncompromising observance by the agency and each journalist working for it of ethical and editorial norms, the principles of INDEPENDENCE, RESPONSIBILITY, ACCURACY AND OBJECTIVITY."

Interfax, the Charter says, shall not permit its information to be used for lobbying the interests of any group of people, organization or company, for covert or overt political or commercial advertising.

In line with the Charter, Interfax journalists shall refrain from expressing their own opinion in the news reports, allowing the users of the information to draw their own conclusions.

### **Business makes money, politics makes images**

Friends and colleagues who believed in the agency helped me greatly. Such systems as ours are collective systems. Clever, talented and energetic people were drawn to us just months after the start of the project. People who were fed up. People with brains. People with character. People who were tired of the idiotic games of news reporting that used to exist at the TV and Radio Committee those days when life was one thing and the news flow another. So a team of like-minded people who became the best news reporters in the country grew around me quite quickly.

Later, during Yeltsin's presidency, we started regarding ourselves as a fully fledged company, became organized as an economic entity and started thinking about the future. It was clear that general political news would remain an important aspect of our work. On the other hand, my previous experience as a person involved with the business world helped me. I realized that political news has a fairly limited market. Who subscribes to it? The mass media, the authorities, foreign representative offices – and that's all. In other words hundreds not thousands of clients. And if we wanted tens of thousands, we had to engage in business news. But there weren't really any such news services in the Soviet Union. We would have to build a business news agency from scratch.

So quite quickly we realized the significance of business news. The example of Reuters made an especially deep impression on me in this respect.

I was amazed when I learned that the sale of political news brought Reuters only 5-6% of its revenues. All the rest came from the financial and economic sector. At the same time I studied the operations of AP and France Presse and realized that agencies specializing only in political news are never wealthy, always short of money. So from the very outset we started following the Reuters model.

The image is created with general political news which everyone quotes, while money comes from the financial and economic unit because business clients pay more, and there are more of them.

Sometime in 1991-1992 we became the first in the country to start developing business and financial reporting focused on individual industries on a professional basis. The format of Interfax business news largely emerged in those years. We tried to bring this format as close to Western standards as possible, and it has changed little over the years.

Back at Radio Moscow we issued a publication for foreigners called Soviet Business Today. Then we became the first to launch industry-specific publications in areas like oil and gas, metals, banking and finance, agriculture. In other words we started developing as a specialized, professional agency covering business topics in detail.

Nobody in the USSR wrote in such a way that would be comprehensible to Western readers and or enable business decisions to be based on this information – about grain imports or contracts for the construction of, say, chemical plants, or currency trade. I remember how government officials were bewildered when we asked about the volume of a contract in dollars or the capacity of the second section of the KAMAZ plant and wondered: "What do you need that for?"

## What is Interfax

We opened our first foreign office in the United States on the wave of the enormous interest in the West in what was happening in the USSR, and later set up companies in Germany, Britain and Hong Kong. Our bureaus started emerging in various parts of the former Soviet Union. And gradually we grew to what we are today.

Today Interfax is an international group of some 35 companies. There are two major geographical zones, the former Soviet Union and China, in which we both gather and sell news and information. The companies in the U.S., Britain, Germany, Hong Kong and Poland only sell our news and analytical products.

Obviously, we are busiest in the former Soviet Union, primarily in Russia. Our agencies in Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan maintain leadership in their respective news markets. They have their own wonderful managers, excellent teams of journalists and their own numerous clients.

Then come the bureaus in other former Soviet republics. All our divisions operating in other countries have their own editorial policies so they are coordinated by but not commanded by

Friends and colleagues who believed in the agency helped me greatly. Such systems as ours are collective systems. So a team of like-minded people who became the best news reporters in the country grew around me quite quickly

## FROM WORLD MEDIA REPORTS

The news agency Interfax, which opened last year, provides consistently accurate information and often has access that foreigners rarely can manage. This week, Interfax not only provided full reports from the Baltic republics but also reported a day in advance that Alexander Bessmertnykh would become foreign minister. Gosteleradio, the government broadcasting authority, evicted Interfax from its building last week in an attempt to shut down the news service, but a day later it found new sponsors and was pumping news out of facsimile machines all over the Moscow.

"The old organs of control simply cannot keep us down anymore," said Mikhail Komissar, the director of Interfax. "The old means no longer work".

Washington Post, January 17, 1991



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the HQ in Russia, where we have some 50 bureaus in virtually all more or less important centers. Separate agencies have been established in each federal district of Russia. There are seven of them. They deal with local news, gathering and selling it in their regions.

And finally there are the sector-specific divisions – the petroleum, gas, energy and financial news agencies.

The Group's biggest foreign project is Interfax-China, which is now the biggest foreign media organization in China.

The Interfax Group has unfolded its unparalleled network of press centers that unites 30 venues in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan.

The Group also includes several specialized divisions developing databases, involved in IR and offering disclosure services. They include the Interfax-Corporate News Agency with its huge corporate information database SPARK that covers 12 million companies in Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan; and the Center for Economic Analysis – a leading analytical company in Russia and CIS issuing rankings of banks and insurance companies under the Interfax-100 and Interfax-1000 brands.

The Group works successfully with leading international corporations. Moody's Interfax Rating Agency, established in partnership with the world leader in the rating business, Moody's Investors Service, is a leader on the Russian market for rating services.

At the end of 2004 the Group plunged into a new business for itself and the Russian market as a whole – credit histories. Interfax's partner in the project is Experian, a major international credit bureau with which the Experian Interfax credit histories bureau has been set up on a parity basis. Experian Interfax is now one of the top three credit bureaus in Russia.

M. Komissar, second from left, with the founders of Interfax (from left to right) A. Martynov, V. Terekhov, R. Abdullin



FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE

Thomson Reuters, one of the biggest names in the international information market, has been a strategic partner of Interfax in Russia in IR services since 2006.

The Interfax-D&B joint venture, set up by Interfax and the international corporation Dun & Bradstreet on a parity basis, launched operations in 2008. The JV supplies international clients with information about Russian companies using the SPARK database as its source.

The foreign divisions of the Group – Central Europe, Germany, USA and Southeast Asia – are run from the London office.

Our total staff exceeds 1,000. We do not disclose information about our revenues. But in any case news agencies are not oil companies, and we are not talking in the hundreds of millions or billions of dollars...

### A live organization

Interfax has clearly achieved major success. However, I do not have the feeling that we have reached the summit yet. Our plans have been mapped out for several years to come. I would want to reiterate that such organizations as ours cannot depend on one particular individual. We have plenty of highly skilled, wonderful people – managers as well as journalists.

By the way, it wasn't before the mid-1990s when we came under attack that we realized that it was lethal to equate Interfax with Komissar. I found this all very interesting, but then I suddenly realized that if Komissar *is* Interfax, it means that somebody might just kill me one day and take everything away. So an organization that could function almost on autopilot had to be built if only out of the instinct for self-preservation. Managers had to appear, people who would be capable of making decisions and running the company successfully.

On the other hand, our rapid growth made it impossible for one person to deal with all matters. The scale of the business, the nature of the issues we dealt with made it essential to involve a big number of talented people in management – people with initiative and knowledge in areas where I am not as well-versed, such as ratings, financial analysis, IR, credit histories and so on.

In general I like it when people with a better knowledge of specific fields work next to me. I like socializing with them, listening to their expert opinions about complex matters and seeing how they formulate their goals and means of achieving them.

I think this is the best way to build a business from scratch. Clearly someone should always come up with the original idea. But then the founding fathers should develop a following – people who will be generating their own new ideas. Bloomberg today is not run by Michael Bloomberg but everything is developing successfully. Reuters is distanced from its shareholders anyway. Naturally I play an active and hopefully important role in the company's life. However, at the same time I can easily travel somewhere for a month, start working on a new project or develop existing ones while the companies function well. I try to motivate my colleagues to generate ideas. The worst thing is when people suddenly start regarding themselves as part of a herd, as people who shouldn't be relied on to make an initiative. Such an organization inevitably dies.

The Interfax Group today is run by the best specialists in the news business: Vladimir Gerasimov, Georgy Gulia, Renat Abdullin, Alexei Gorshkov, Vyacheslav Terekhov, Sergei Yakovlev, Yury Pogorely, Roman Laba, Alexei Meshkov, Rodion Romov and many others.

Our managers develop their own ideas and themselves put them into practice.

Everyone has projects. To my mind this is a sign of the company's good health. And I am happy that I even have to restrain my colleagues at times and tell them to slow down, they're going too fast. This is much better than looking at blank expressions...

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# It can't be true!

## recollections of an Interfax sensational news story about how Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution on the Communist Party's leading role was scrapped

**Among our highest-flying news stories, which brought Interfax instant media prominence globally, was a report – perhaps the best one in 1990 – about the Communist Party's plans to put the abolition of Article 6 on the agenda of its next plenary meeting**



Renat Abdullin,  
Political Information  
Service President,  
Interfax Group

**A**n Interfax journalist got word from his friends at a secret Moscow research institute that the leaders of their Communist Party organization were preparing a meeting with an extremely important agenda – something that could trigger a very interesting twist in the country's life.

Well, he came to the party meeting and discreetly took a seat in the corner. What he heard was a stunning piece of news. "We have received a letter from the Central Committee proposing that we discuss the agenda for the upcoming plenary meeting and one of its items is abolition of Article 6 on the leading and guiding role of the Soviet Communist Party," the party boss said. Effectively, this would herald the advent of a new, multi-party system.

The reporter came back to Interfax with a carefully written account of the meeting. He then turned to his other friends, used unofficial channels and talked with acquaintances in a couple of other party organizations to check the news, and the confirmation was given. So we let the news out even before the plenary meeting convened. It was like a bomb going off. The thing is no one at that time would ven-

ture to articulate anything of this kind ahead of the Communist Party's national newspaper Pravda or the state-controlled news agency TASS.

The effect was staggering! We all worked in a small office at the State Television and Radio Committee headquarters in the center of Moscow at that time and we only had a few telephones, which started ringing all at once, bringing calls from the United States, Britain, Japan and elsewhere. Everyone wanted to know where we had fished this information from and whether we were sure it was true. "Yes, we are one hundred percent sure," we would say. Interfax had won the reputation of a reliable source by that time and we always worked scrupulously to make our reports trustworthy. It was a rule with us never to report events without a thorough check.

A Reuters executive told us later that he learned the news by telephone from a Reuters correspondent, or from the Moscow bureau chief – he did not remember – when he was at a London pub, discussing plans for the weekend.

"Listen, something absolutely unbelievable is going on here! Interfax says Article 6



will be scrapped! What are we going to do?" the colleague's voice said from Moscow.

"No! It just can't be true. Never! Interfax? Any quotes? Facts?"

"They quote a Central Committee document!"

"OK, go ahead, send it out," the Reuters guy said after a moment's thought.

The Reuters bureau knew and trusted us by that time.

Lots of foreign mass media – news agencies, newspapers and television channels – quoted our story in the wake of the events. It seems quite natural today to

learn news like that about Article 6 in an easy way like this. But the time we lived in was different, and it carried the marks of the outgoing totalitarian regime and of a fledgling democratic society. Journalists had to take risks, working by trial and error. "Will it pass?" they would ask themselves. The risks involved were serious indeed – dismissal, the news agency's shutdown, or even prosecution. Going to a closed Communist Party meeting like that and quietly sending out a report... This seemed impossible then, and also risky. But we did it and we won!

We have received a letter from the Central Committee proposing that we discuss the agenda for the upcoming plenary meeting and one of its items is abolition of Article 6 on the leading and guiding role of the Soviet Communist Party

## FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE



10/03/1990 22:18 RUSSIA & CIS GENERAL NEWSWIRE (RealTime, En, Ru)  
**NEWS ABOUT THE USSR**

The draft agenda handed out to the participants in the full scale meeting of the CPSU Central Committee opening tomorrow suggests considering the question of the party's new rules.

Besides, according to participants, the Plenum will formulate its proposal concerning Article 6 of the USSR Constitution. The proposal will have the status of a legal initiative. It will declare that the party shall not seek any special status guaranteed by the Constitution.

Participants in the Plenum also believe that it will consider the nomination of a candidate for the presidency and point to Mikhail Gorbachev as the most likely contender from the CPSU. At the same time, some participants in the Plenum do not rule out the possibility that the Plenum may present two candidates to the Congress of People's Deputies.

However, Interfax believes that this is very unlikely. The executive secretary of the inter-regional group of deputies Arkady Murashov believes that at the early Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR opening on March 12 "Mikhail Gorbachev will manage to carry out all his plans, although he will encounter considerable difficulties".

Arkady Murashov said that it will be very difficult to win a majority of 1500 votes necessary to make amendments to the Constitution resulting from the introduction of presidential rule. The groups of deputies from the Baltic republics and Georgia are expected to avoid taking part in the voting.

The interregional group of deputies, too, is against debates on the bill. It believes that that issue must first be discussed by the newly elected Parliaments of union republics, and coordinated with a future union law and Constitution.

As far as the election of a President is concerned, Arkady Murashov said the electorate made it clear in the latest elections that "they do not empower us to do so." A majority want the President to be elected on the basis of universal and direct suffrage.

Arkady Murashov says that the work of the Congress and its resolutions may be influenced by the adoption of a Declaration of Independence the Supreme Soviet of Lithuania scheduled for these days.

About Article 6 of the USSR Constitution proclaiming the CPSU's leading role in society, Murashov said that it is likely that the Congress will consider that issue, although it is absent from the agenda suggested by the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. A number of parliamentary commissions and committees call for considering it in the same package with the bill on presidential rule.

# The Soviet Union planned to introduce a market economy on a date set by the Politburo



Mikhail Komissar,  
Chairman of the Board of  
Directors of Interfax Group  
(1991 photo)

**This is hard to believe today, but in 1990, the Soviet leadership, aware that its current economic course was leading nowhere and seeing the gravity of the economic situation, decided to introduce a market economy in the country on some specific date, almost overnight. A decision to that effect was being prepared in secret by a small team of economists who were close to General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. This plan to blow up the ultimate basis of communist ideology, planned economics, was being kept so secret that even some of Gorbachev's closest aides were unaware of it**

**A**round mid-May 1990, Interfax correspondents who were reporting from economic government agencies ran across a series of draft laws and various draft directives to bring about the country's transition to a market economy. Not only did our journalists find out the actual fact that the Soviet leadership was preparing such a decision, an extremely important move that would become a turning point in national history. They were also able to get hold of the texts of the documents that were being prepared. We studied those drafts and, after making sure that they reflected earnest intentions on the part of the government, published a news story headlined "Nine new bills to introduce market economy."

It's unbelievable what this set off. The whole world seemed to have gone crazy. Just imagine: throughout its history the Soviet Union had been going on about the harmful nature of market economics and insisting that a planned economy was the solution; throughout its history it had fought any economic initiative and any desire on the part of its people to raise productivity, develop business or make money with their own efforts. Then all of a sudden it officially declares an intention to go over to a market economy, and to do so really quickly as well (the news said the bills were to be put before parliament in September). The news was undoubtedly a bombshell. We were getting calls from all over the world, and the leading media outlets of all countries were quoting our story.

Then, at one point, the phone rang in my little office in the State Television and Radio Committee building on Pyatnitskaya Street. I answered but for several minutes was unable to get a word in because of yelling at the other end. Eventually I realized that the caller was none other than Gorbachev's press secretary, Arkady Maslennikov, a man who at that time seemed to us to be omnipotent. What he was yelling about was

essentially this: we had "launched a provocative report, which misrepresented the essence of the policy of Gorbachev and the Soviet government," we had "published total and absolute disinformation that had nothing to do with reality" and we would "face punishment with the full severity of the law."

A few minutes later I managed to put in some explanations. I said that we were sure enough about the copy we had published and that it had a serious basis and it was not an invention by our journalists.

Maslennikov responded with another long tirade to the effect that "I didn't realize who I was talking to," that "I was trying to teach him something I shouldn't," and that "he knew better what was happening than I did." When I again tried to argue, he said unexpectedly, "So that's what you're up to! Okay, come here, I'm waiting for you."

That was my first visit to the compound on Staraya Square that housed the Presidential Administration and Maslennikov's office. I had never been to any of those official buildings before, and, let me confess, it was with some sense of trepidation – though with some interest as well – that I was going there. On the other hand, I was sure of our information because we even had photocopies of those nine draft laws. I

Throughout its history the Soviet Union had been going on about the harmful nature of market economics. Then all of a sudden it officially declares an intention to go over to a market economy, and to do so really quickly as well

## FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE



21/05/1990 22:18 RUSSIA & CIS GENERAL NEWSWIRE (RealTime, En, Ru)

### GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS FOR TRANSITION TO MARKET ECONOMY DRAFTED

The USSR government has drafted a report "On the Economic Situation of the Country and the Concept of Transition to a Controlled Market Economy" for debates in the USSR Supreme Soviet and a bill "On the Basic Principles of the Reform of Retail Prices and Measures to Ensure the Social Security of the Population".

The government's report says that the economic situation this year "has remained extremely complicated despite certain favorable shifts. Moreover, many negative processes have escalated".

As is seen in statistical surveys the people's cash incomes in the first three months of the year were up 13.4 per cent, while the GNP declined. Cooperatives producing goods and services account for nearly one-third of the increase in pay in the first quarter of the year.

The lack of political stability in society, strikes and ethnic conflicts have been causing an ever serious effect on the economy. In January through April alone "working time losses caused by ethnic conflicts and strikes totalled 9.5 million man-days, whereas in the whole past year the same factor led to a loss of 7 million man-hours." The report says that there has emerged another serious problem – the stoppages of industrial facilities due to the pollution of the environment. Last year more than one thousand major industrial plants or production units suspended operation for ecological reasons.

The main aim of the strategy of transition to a controlled market, according to the government report, is to combine economic and administrative measures to gradually reduce the scale of direct state control of the economy and to expand the sphere of market relations, as well as to prevent unbridled inflation, serious declines in production or a sharp fall in the standard of living. The government report provides for multi-stage transition to a market economy.

"At the preparatory stage, extending until the end of 1990, the legal basis of a market economy will be finalized and the necessary technical measures taken. Particular attention will be paid to preparations for a reform of prices and for setting up a developed network of social support for the population.

At the stage when market relations are established (1991-1992) the main prerequisites for an effective market will be brought about. As a full-fledged market appears, the promotion of competition and demonopolization will be brought to the forefront. To give a boost to the reform and make the whole package of economic measures a success a number of large-scale and inter-related steps will be taken as of 1991 – a reform of prices, the introduction of a new taxation system, higher interest rates and other moves...

We were amazed that even people in Gorbachev's closest entourage were unaware of fundamental, crucial, strategic plans for the country's development – all those plans were based on initiatives by individual people who were working in the secrecy of their offices and whose greatest fear was that colleagues who were "ideologically correct" would accuse them of betraying official ideals

went into Maslennikov's office and had to hear quite long and fierce tirades from Gorbachev's press secretary. Eventually he asked me, "Do you understand it all and are you prepared to publish a denial?" I shook my head stubbornly and tried to tell him I was sure our information was authentic. Maslennikov nearly choked with wrath. His face got crimson, and he said, "Okay! You don't believe me, do you? Then I hope you will believe Gorbachev's chief economic aide."

He turned to an intercom phone and dialed the number of Academician Nikolai Petrakov. The speakerphone was on, and I could hear a voice saying at the other end, "Hello?" Maslennikov told Petrakov that there was the head of Interfax, Mikhail Komissar, in his office currently (I was sure that at that time Petrakov didn't know about me but he didn't show this in any way) and that he was sticking to his "lunatic idea that the Soviet Union is planning to go over to a market economy." "You just think what a piece of rubbish they've come up with," Maslennikov was saying to Petrakov. "They are saying that government has prepared nine draft laws to govern various aspects of putting the Soviet economy on a market basis." What happened the next moment I will remember all my life. The voice at the other end – absolutely calm – corrected Maslennikov: "Not nine. There will be a lot more documents." The powerful speakerphone emitted a disconnection tone.

Maslennikov, pale in the face, stood there frozen to the spot, his mouth open and the handset still in his hand, until I sneaked out of the office to save him more embarrassment.

That was how, in May 1990, the world learned from an Interfax report that the Soviet Union was planning to introduce a market economy.

We were amazed that even people in Gorbachev's closest entourage were unaware of fundamental, crucial, strategic plans for the country's development – all those plans were based on initiatives by individual people who were working in the secrecy of their offices and whose greatest fear was that colleagues who were "ideologically correct" would accuse them of betraying official ideals.

## First business publications of Interfax

INDEPENDENT NEWS AGENCY  
**interfax**  
25 Pyatnitskaya St., Moscow, 113326 USSR Tel 233-6844 Fax 231-8110, 233-0929 Telex 411135  
• BUSINESS TODAY • BUSINESS TODAY •

26 февраля 1991 года

ПАРЛАМЕНТ СССР ОБСУЖДАЕТ ПРОЕКТ ЗАКОНА О ПРЕДПРИНИМАТЕЛЬСТВЕ

Созывая парламент начал 26 февраля обсуждение в первом чтении проект закона "Об основах предпринимательства в СССР", который направлен на развитие хозяйственной инициативы граждан при равенстве всех форм собственности.

Приведем основные положения проекта:

– Отношения, связанные с предпринимательством, независимо от форм собственности, виза и сферы деятельности регулируются настоящим Законом и не противоречащими ему законодательными актами Союза ССР и республик;

– Особенности предпринимательской деятельности иностранных граждан, в том числе в части приобретения имущества государственного предприятия, регулируются законодательством Союза ССР и республик об иностранных инвестициях на территории СССР;

– Предпринимательством могут заниматься:

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б/ любой иностранный гражданин (или лицо без гражданства), за исключением случаев, предусмотренных законодательными актами Союза ССР и республик;

в/ группа граждан (партизнов) – коллективные предприниматели;

– Частное предпринимательство может осуществляться:

а/ без применения наемного труда;

б/ с применением наемного труда;

в/ без образования юридического лица;

г/ с образованием юридического лица.

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IN TODAY'S ISSUE  
СЕГОДНЯ В ВЫПУСКЕ

1 июня 1990 года. 1999

\*\*\* БИЗНЕС-ХРОНИКА

\*\*\* БИЗНЕС В СССР. ПРОЕКТЫ

– СЗ рядом с "Шереметьево-2" в Москве.

\*\*\* ЗАКОНЫ & КОНСУЛЬТАЦИИ

– Разрабатывается новое законодательство об СП.

\*\*\* СОВЕТСКАЯ ПРЕССА ЗА НЕДЕЛЮ



# Those were the times!

## or to a market economy in 500 Days

**Andrei Martynov, former Interfax News Agency Deputy General Director, recalls how Interfax compiled the first economic news in the USSR and how it reported plans of transition to a market economy**

**I**n summer 1990 we started publishing the Soviet Business Report, a weekly publication for which we could hardly scrape together a few reports about the development of business in the USSR. It contained mainly news about law-making and set down new decrees, resolutions and laws that elderly senior scholars, young economists and various deputies drafted in an attempt to reform the economy.

Occasionally there would also be news about the visits of representatives of big foreign companies. I liked making up headlines for them, copying the style of Western news agencies and newspapers. Something like “Sony announces the formation of another JV in the USSR”, or “Chevron signs a multibillion oil contract in Kazakhstan”, or “Gorbachev promises tax breaks to French business”. The names of companies and foreign businessmen had to be written in Latin letters for our translators and also because that way it looked much more impressive.

Sometimes there would be no news for the Soviet Business Report at all, or to be more exact only something minor and of little interest to both me and our subscribers. However, gradually things started rolling.

Everything was only just beginning, and it was very interesting, exciting even. In general, I believe that Interfax was a godsend to me. It was a fortuity, totally unexpected and perfectly timed.

In a way it had also been interesting at Radio Moscow, where almost everyone involved in establishing the agency worked. We could write and put on air almost anything that came to mind! Thus the leadership of my department (broadcasting to Scandinavia and Finland) became almost liberal and my “Roundtable”, “Youth Club” and programs based on listeners’ letters were censored and approved by my elder colleagues. These colleagues were only a few years older than me. They were Alexander Lyubimov (Danish section, later head of the highly popular Vzglyad TV program, currently deputy head of the Russian State TV and Radio Company), Oleg Vakulovsky (Swedish section, later also worked for Vzglyad, still later an analyst at the TVC television channel, writer and director), and Dmitry Kiselyov (Norwegian section, now a political analyst at RTR channel). They were my first true teachers in day-to-day practical journalism.

At Interfax, where I was invited by the agency’s founding father Mikhail Komissar himself, I became my own boss at the age of 26. I was entrusted with organizing the business section.

Young experts – around 30 – from the Institute of International Economics and International Relations, a famous think-tank then led by Stanislav Shatalin, Gorbachev’s economics advisor, started collaborating with Interfax those days. At the institute they worked on various programs and planned



Andrei Martynov,  
Former Deputy General  
Director of Interfax



Every time I was captivated by the ideas of reform but could not get from my source the main thing at that time – what Gorbachev and Yeltsin thought about all these “days”

reforms. There were also people from the institutes led by other prominent economists – Leonid Abalkin and Abel Aganbegian. They also brought along files with texts, diagrams and charts that were barely comprehensible to me and explained to me what all that meant. They taught me the ins and outs of economics.

A graduate of the department of journalism of Moscow State University, I was a nonentity for mathematicians and economists. “What did they teach you there?” they would ask me. I blushed and tried to promptly change the subject.

Sergei Komlev was one of those from Shatalin’s institute. It was he who gave me a stack of paper which it seems to me was called “Ways out of the crisis. 400 days”. I read it fast and understood almost everything! The paper described the sequence of steps to rebuild the Soviet economy, privatization, the banking and pension reforms and others. With transition to the market as the result.

In the corridor where Komlev always asked me to step out for explanations about the essence of the issue it dawned on me that this was a matter of national importance and that Interfax was destined to tell the world public about the revolutionary essence of what was being proposed. Every time I was captivated by the ideas of reform but could not get from my source the main thing at that time – what Gorbachev and Yeltsin thought about all these “days”. And whether there was a chance that all

these intentions would remain one of many projects on paper. Interfax could inform its subscribers about this plan, only if it had anything to do with the real policy of the country and its leadership, we at the newborn news agency felt.

Days went by...

Then one day I was invited to the office of Grigory Yavlinsky, who was then the deputy prime minister in the Russian Federation Cabinet led by Ivan Silayev. It was Yavlinsky who was in charge of the economic reform. I was solemnly handed an even thicker stack of paper, now called “500 Days”, in his office in the Russian government building.

“Solemnly” is the word, I remember it well.

Yavlinsky told me in detail about the plan spanning 500 Days and seemed to have been content with my quick understanding. Thanks to Komlev I was clued in. Sergei Zverev, then Yavlinsky’s aide, closely followed me all that time. He was sitting in the corner, Yavlinsky behind his enormous desk with me in front of him. Komlev, who had brought me to the deputy prime minister, was pacing the floor, looking out of the window (an excellent view of the Hotel Ukraine, the River Moskva and Kutuzovsky Avenue!), at me, Zverev and Yavlinsky. He remained silent.

Finally after a while when nobody said anything without looking at each other, Yavlinsky got up: “The program has Yeltsin’s approval. Interfax can circulate it. Does your agency want to be the first?”

## FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE

01/08/1990 22:00 RUSSIA & CIS GENERAL NEWSWIRE (RealTime, En, Ru)

### GORBACHEV AND YELTSIN MADE A DEAL ON SETTING UP A JOINT GROUP OF EXPERTS ON ECONOMIC REFORM

President Gorbachev and the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation Yeltsin have agreed on setting up a joint group of experts broadly representing Soviet republics to draw up the overall concept of transition to a market-led economy on a nationwide scale before September when the national and Russian parliaments meet for their fall sessions...



G. Yavlinsky, author of the "500 Days" program, at a press conference at the Interfax Central Office (photo signed by Yavlinsky)



"Definitely! I will make a report and send it to you by fax for authorization. So that there would be no mistakes or inaccuracies."

Yavlinsky looked at Zverev. The latter nodded and wrote a fax number on his card, crossing out the one that was printed on it.

"It would be good if other media would not get wind of this report before it goes out on our newswire...I mean that it has Yeltsin's approval..." I stammered.

Komlev was about to giggle but Yavlinsky shook my hand gravely and, looking into my eyes, said: "Agreed!" Zverev winked at me and handed me his corrected visiting card.

I returned to Interfax by metro train, holding my briefcase with the life-changing text close and thinking over options of the lead and structure of the report. "Yeltsin is planning radical economic reform." That was the headline under which Interfax released the news the following day. It seems to me that it was a Saturday. That Saturday and the following day, Sunday, all the world's agencies reported the news (that happened before and has happened since, many times). All the world's leading newspapers published the news: The Wall

Street Journal, The Financial Times and later The Economist. Just everyone!

Many journalists called us to clarify things: "Is it true that Yeltsin approved it?", "What does Gorbachev think about it?", "Who is there in addition to Yavlinsky?"

Soviet TV and radio remained silent and by Monday I got somewhat nervous: who knows what it meant?! What if Yeltsin was unaware? Why did the Soviet media remain silent? In the meantime I saw references to our report about the "500 Days" program on the newswires of international agencies: there were teletype terminals in the Radio Moscow building where Interfax was still operating.

For the first time in my life I was granting interviews to my colleagues – journalists from foreign countries. After all, few could succeed in reaching Yavlinsky. He was overwhelmed by scores of reporters and he, it is said, was giving an account to Yeltsin. I learned about it later. And I was asked, as the writer of the report, such things as: "Do you believe in the feasibility of the proposed reforms?", "What will Gorbachev say?" That was the sort of questions I was asked! Those were the times!

It was Yavlinsky who was in charge of the economic reform. I was solemnly handed an even thicker stack of paper, now called "500 Days" in his office in the Russian government building

# The last day of the Soviet Union

## recollections of an eyewitness



Vyacheslav Terekhov,  
First Deputy General Director  
Interfax News Agency

**December 1991 will go down into history as the time when the USSR, one of the world's greatest powers for over 70 years, ceased to exist. "The USSR is no more." The phrase that spread round the world in an instant, was reported by Interfax correspondents from Almaty 23 minutes ahead of all other news agencies**

**I**t was a cloudy day in December. The heads of 11 Soviet republics met in Kazakhstan's capital Almaty at the House of Friendship (what a paradox!) to decide the future of their so far common homeland – the USSR. Hamlet's "To be or not to be?" was an especially topical question in the assembly hall. No journalists were present. They were waiting for "the verdict" in the press center in a different place.

My Interfax colleague Boris Grishchenko and I had arrived in Almaty in advance. Benefiting from good, business-like, I'd even say warm and trusting relations with Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, we succeeded in getting a 10-minute private conversation with him. He had only one condition – it was not going to be an interview, it was a briefing to help us understand the situation.

During the meeting we learned that the leaders would discuss accession to the agreement on the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States which had been signed by Russia, Belarus and Ukraine in Belovezhskaya Pushcha two weeks earlier.

At first we did not understand: will the USSR now be called the CIS? Who would be president, vice president, prime minister?

Here I should explain that after the failure of the coup in August 1991 the question of vice presidency and premiership was raised at various meetings of the leadership of the USSR and the republics. I had heard about candidates for the posts. I felt that the most realistic thing to do to preserve the country and stop the republics from running away was to place Nazarbayev at the head of the government (journalists also discussed the following arrangement: Mikhail Gorbachev as president, Nazarbayev as vice president and Kazimiera Prunskiene, previously the prime minister of Lithuania, as premier).

Armed with these rumors I asked about the appointments. Nazarbayev was silent for a moment. Then he replied: "None of these suggestions will be discussed." More silence and... "None, you understand? Nothing. Don't try me. I can't say what it is but we're on the threshold of..." he thought a little and said "...of an event!"

It seems to me that he tried to find an adjective to the word "event" but failed. He told us though that after the attempted coup Soviet President Gorbachev did offer him the post of vice president but Nazarbayev would agree only to the com-

bination of the posts of vice president and prime minister. Gorbachev was against this. "I could not accept his proposal because as a result I would have become an errand boy, and that wouldn't have benefited the country or my republic, or me for that matter," Nazarbayev explained later.

So, Almaty on December 21, 1991. After meeting Nazarbayev we understood everything. We decided that when we came to the press center we would pay for a long telephone conversation with Moscow in advance. There were only two telephone booths in the lobby of the press center and in order to call you had to pay in advance at one of the counters. Only after getting a receipt could you enter a booth and be connected.

After the first session of the heads of the 11 republics the press secretary of the Kazakh president came to the press and, by his expression, we saw what the leaders of the republics had voted for.

Here is how Boris Grishchenko describes that moment in his book "An

Outsider in the Kremlin": "It is easy to imagine what happened in the lobby of the former building of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan [where the press center was located]. When [Nazarbayev's press secretary] Serik Matayev told journalists that the republics were leaving the USSR and joining the CIS, the multilingual horde of journalists rushed to the desks where they had to pay for telephone calls and to the booths that were the embodiment of Almaty's communications with the rest of the world at the time."

"The girl behind the desk tried in vain to get the journalists to form some sort of a line while the two of us already burst into the two booths. Vyacheslav [Terekhov] was shouting into the receiver at the top of his voice so that the stenographer would hear the words 'the USSR is no more' above the roaring crowd."

Meanwhile, Boris pretended that the cable had broken in the neighboring booth. And more from his book: "My back was swelling from punches and jabs, my

"The USSR is no more."  
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FROM THE BOOK "KREMLIN CHRONICLE", published by EXMO, Moscow, 1994, page 416

**Author: A.S. Grachev, Candidate of Historical Sciences, writer and former USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev's last press spokesman**

"...It was now Saturday, December 21. The meeting between the leaders of the 11 republics in Almaty had almost reached its climax due to the time difference by the time I got to work. It did finish at noon. Interfax was the first to put the historic news story out:

#### THE USSR IS NO MORE

"...At noon Moscow time on December 21, the leaders of 11 sovereign states meeting behind closed doors in Almaty reached agreement to terminate the USSR's existence.

It was also reported that eight more former Soviet republics, among them Moldova, had joined the agreement on the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, signed by Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Thus, all republics except Georgia and the Baltic States have now joined the Commonwealth.

Interfax reporters understand that the issue of Georgia's membership remains open for the time being as its representatives in Almaty do not have sufficient mandates.

It is anticipated that a protocol on the consent of the heads of state and an Almaty Declaration by the heads of the 11 states will be signed in the next two hours..."





The girl behind the desk tried in vain to get the journalists to form some sort of a line while the two of us already burst into the two booths. Vyacheslav [Terekhov] was shouting into the receiver at the top of his voice so that the stenographer would hear the words 'the USSR is no more' above the roaring crowd

V. Terekhov and Soviet President M. Gorbachev



jacket was torn, one sleeve was hanging on a thread but we were happy – Interfax had reported historic news 23 minutes ahead of its competitors. The thing is that after relating the full text of the signed statement my colleague deliberately talked with Moscow for a long time. That night many of the fellow journalists wanted to give us a beating.”

... And only when we were walking back to the hotel, intoxicated by our victory, did the reality of what we had reported suddenly sink in and gave me goosebumps. “Boris, do you realize what we just did? In our ecstasy we just buried our motherland in which we had lived for decades. Now we live in a different country. And our old country is no more.”

## FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE

21/12/1991 15:00 RUSSIA & CIS GENERAL NEWSWIRE (RealTime, En, Ru)

### **GORBACHEV NOTIFIED OF END OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE PRESIDENCY IN USSR**

Leaders of 11 sovereign republics, having formed the Commonwealth of Independent States, have made an appeal to President of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev, in which they notify him of the end of the existence of the Soviet Union and the institution of the presidency of the USSR. In the appeal the heads of the independent states thank Gorbachev for his large positive contribution.





1. V. Terekhov at a briefing
2. B. Grishchenko (second from right) at meeting with Russia's first president, B. Yeltsin
3. B. Grishchenko with Russia's first president, B. Yeltsin and Yeltsin's wife, Naina, at a polling station in Moscow



## FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE



21/12/1991 15:00 RUSSIA & CIS GENERAL NEWSWIRE (RealTime, En, Ru)  
**YELTSIN ANNOUNCES THAT GORBACHEV WILL RESIGN IN DECEMBER**

Russian President Boris Yeltsin said during the visit to the capital of Kazakhstan on Saturday, that "the main thing is that the transition from the USSR to the Commonwealth takes place peacefully, without bloodshed."

In the new Commonwealth, Yeltsin said at the airport, every state will be independent. "In addition to this," he said, "they will decide common issues in a coordinated fashion, especially with regard to united armed strategic forces and united management of nuclear weapons, which especially worries the world community."

"We regard Mikhail Gorbachev with respect," the Russian President added, "and want him to resign in December, exactly as he himself wishes."

"For 70 whole years not a single leader of our state has left power in a peaceful way: either his grave was dug over again or he was definitely accused of a crime," Yeltsin stated. "We want the President of the country, who despite admitted mistakes did so much good, to resign with dignity," the Russian President emphasized.

Yeltsin further said that on Friday in Brussels aid measures were confirmed, decided upon by the West for the USSR, however, taking into account that instead of the USSR the CIS is being created, it was decided to distribute this aid among the republics.

# October 1993:

## an Interfax correspondent as a peacemaker



Mikhail Komissar,  
Chairman of the Board of  
Directors of Interfax Group



Vyacheslav Terekhov,  
First Deputy General Director  
Interfax News Agency

**Vyacheslav Terekhov:** Early in October 1993 Russia was on the brink of civil war. On one side there was President Boris Yeltsin, on the other the leadership of the then parliament, the Supreme Soviet, with speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov at the head and Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, who had proclaimed himself president of Russia. The standoff reached its peak as Yeltsin issued a decree to dissolve the Supreme Soviet. This wasn't in the plans of the legislature, and it refused to go. The scythe struck the stone.

I was back from vacation on the evening of October 2 and went straight to the office from the airport. Mikhail Komissar gave me a gloomy reception. Groups of armed militants serving Khasbulatov and Rutskoi were filling the streets of Moscow. There was no authority in evidence. Neither the Kremlin nor the military nor the police would answer any phone calls. One had a feeling some dark and savage force was taking hold of the city.

**Mikhail Komissar:** We were sure that the White House, the parliament headquarters, was a safer place to be than the streets. It seemed the city had been captured and we couldn't imagine that Yeltsin might order an armed attack. We assumed that it was a lot more dangerous to stay in the Interfax office, which was apparently becoming one of the targets for the militants who were infesting the streets of Moscow.

Senior Interfax executives, including myself, were in the office permanently and even slept there. Our drivers were heroically supplying us with sandwiches, managing to pick up the food goodness knows where.

As Vyacheslav Terekhov was setting off for the White House, I gave him some documents and letters to my wife and children because I was sure he would be secure there while no one knew what would happen to us. We couldn't have been in a worse mood.

**V.T.:** Mikhail and I parted, doing so as though this was our last meeting, and I went to the White House with a heavy heart. Though the building had cordons around it – it was unclear whether they were supporters or enemies of the Rutskoi-Khasbulatov camp – I knew some back doors and was able to get in quite easily and join the Interfax team of reporters inside.

**M.K.:** I had a call from one of the senior executives at TASS, the state news agency, who whispered to me that TASS had been captured and its general director, Vitaly Ignatenko, had been arrested. The caller asked me to contact Prime

Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and tell him they needed help. I called one of Chernomyrdin's aides. The aide started swearing obscenely – they were obviously unaware TASS had been seized – and ran to the premier. Soon after that the militants were driven out of the TASS headquarters.

Then I had a call from Vladimir Markov, chief of RIA, another state news agency, who said, “Mikhail, some of them have been here and said they were off to Interfax.”

I gave orders to lock all the outside doors, switch off the lights (it was nighttime) and draw the curtains to make it seem there was no one inside. A while later our steel front door was shaking with blows, and we were sitting there with bated breath as if we were on board a submarine during an attack.

Meanwhile, we were silently tapping the keys on our computers in the dark of the curtained rooms, whispering into the phones when making calls, receiving information, and sending out news. I don't think I'll ever forget this phantasmagorical picture of silent work in the dark, with silhouettes of friends leaning over computer screens.

**V.T.:** When the night of October 3 came, my colleagues and I went to bed, lying down on tables in the cafeteria. Communication was getting harder and harder because the telephones and electricity were off and it was increasingly difficult to recharge mobiles. News did come in, though, and needed reporting. But how? It wasn't like these days, with everyone having a mobile. Somebody said the only phones that were working were those in Khasbulatov's office. That's where I went, feeling optimistic as Khasbulatov's security guards knew me.

As I was walking along the corridor, I unexpectedly ran into Khasbulatov. After saying hello to me, he asked me to get Interfax to publish an address from him, which, in part, said: “You should not be afraid of us. We are legalists and will strictly abide by the letter and spirit of the law.”

I felt like taking issue with that but thought I'd better not argue and just said I would be happy to transmit the address but had no means of doing so.

“Come with me. I've got a radio telephone in my reception office that's powered by an engine,” Khasbulatov said.

He took me to his office. That was a real piece of luck as the phone there did work.

The morning of October 4 came. The tanks started firing, and the storming of the White House began. There was smoke, shouting and gunshots everywhere inside the building.

An army officer came into Khasbulatov's office, where I was sitting in the corner.

Groups of armed militants serving Khasbulatov and Rutskoi were filling the streets of Moscow. There was no authority in evidence. Neither the Kremlin nor the military nor the police would answer any phone calls. One had a feeling some dark and savage force was taking hold of the city

## FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE

03/10/1993 15:00 RUSSIA & CIS GENERAL NEWSWIRE (RealTime, En, Ru)

### **PRESIDENT YELTSIN IMPOSES STATE OF EMERGENCY IN MOSCOW**

Interfax learned from the Russian President's press service that on Sunday Boris Yeltsin signed a decree to impose a state of emergency in Moscow.



We were sure that the White House, the parliament headquarters, was a safer place to be than the streets. It seemed the city had been captured and we couldn't imagine that Yeltsin might order an armed attack

"Comrade Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, the Kantemirovskaya and Tamanskaya divisions have ignored Yeltsin's orders to join in the storming of the White House and have stayed in their barracks," the officer said.

Khasbulatov, pale in the face, interrupted him, and, turning to his "ministers" and Rutskoi, said, "I don't really care that the divisions have ignored Yeltsin's orders. What I do care about is why they haven't left the barracks to come and defend us. Where are the helicopters and planes you've promised us? According to you, they were supposed to be here by now, showing themselves to be defenders of the Supreme Soviet."

There was silence in response.

Khasbulatov looked at me and asked whether I had made contact with Interfax.

I nodded, and he asked me to send in a statement to the effect that the leadership of the Supreme Soviet, "seeking to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, is open to negotiations."

Meanwhile the tanks kept shelling the building, and there were explosions to the right, to the left of Khasbulatov's office. It was hell: explosions, fire, stifling smoke getting into your throat and making your eyes water.

Meanwhile, there was Mikhail Komissar at the other end, maintaining permanent contact with me. He managed somehow to get through to Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin directly.

"They're happy to hold talks, Mikhail. Let Chernomyrdin know," I yelled to him, trying to shout over the thundering of explosions.

**M.K.:** Vyacheslav was getting hoarse as he was shouting into the phone, "Tell them to stop firing. Khasbulatov is happy to hold talks. We'll all be dead here if this doesn't stop."

I realized that this might be the last time I was hearing Vyacheslav's voice. In total desperation, I was able, with a lot of effort, to get through to Yeltsin's press secretary, Vyacheslav Kostikov.

"There's nothing I can do to help. They should have been wiser before," he answered in an estranged and cold voice.

## FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE

04/10/1993 00:01 RUSSIA & CIS PRESIDENTIAL BULLETIN (Daily, En, Ru)  
**SPECIAL EDITION**

### YELTSIN TAKES MEASURES TO BRING SITUATION UNDER CONTROL

President Yeltsin issued a decree on urgent measures to enforce emergency regulations in Moscow. The defense ministry is instructed to allocate whatever force and means are needed to enforce the state of emergency by bringing them under control of Moscow commandant Alexander Kulikov for a period up to October 10. The interior, security and defense ministers are instructed to form a joint headquarters for running army units and other forces designed to implement the state of emergency in Moscow.

The commandant is under orders to take immediate measures to free the facilities seized by "criminal elements" and disarm illegal armed units.





**Mikhail Komissar with Vyacheslav Kostikov, press secretary of Russian President Boris Yeltsin, 1994**



"But Vyacheslav is there!" I yelled into the phone after I realized that I'd just heard a death sentence on Terekhov.

"There's nothing I can do," Kostikov answered in a voice that had something terrifying, deadening about it, a voice I'll never forget.

These days, many years later, I realize that he was telling the truth and that, because he was a good, kind-hearted and cultured man, a man besides who knew Terekhov personally and very well, it was making him suffer to pronounce those horrific words.

At that point, I remembered how efficiently our communications line with Chernomyrdin had been when it enabled us to rescue our fellow journalists from the captured building of TASS.

I phoned Valentin Sergeyev, an aide to the premier. Sergeyev spoke to Chernomyrdin and called me back. "Tell them we won't talk to them. Let them surrender or we'll mow them all down," he said.

I phoned Terekhov and passed the prime-ministerial verdict to him.

Terekhov called back soon and said the White House lot were happy to go out but that the building was under intense fire from all sides. He said Khasbulatov and Rutskoi were asking to be told which entrance they should use to leave the building without getting caught in the fire.

The telephones and electricity were off and it was increasingly difficult to recharge mobiles. News did come in, though, and needed reporting. But how?



1. Vyacheslav Terekhov with Boris Yeltsin, the first Russian president
2. Ruslan Khasbulatov, former chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet
3. Vyacheslav Terekhov with Alexander Rutskoi, former Russian vice president



I passed the premier's new proposal to the White House guys. Rutskoi came up to me and asked me to get Interfax to announce that he and the White House leadership were ready to go outside

I remember that the premier's aide, after consulting someone, gave me the number of the entrance, and I passed it on to Terekhov.

Soon, however, Vyacheslav phoned me back saying, "We can't get out, they keep firing. Do they want to bump us all off?"

In sheer anxiety, I was back on the phone to the premier's office. Everyone at the other end was agitated, and it was hard to talk. There was such an amount of unprintable vocabulary being used that it took quite an effort to try to figure out the meaning of what was being said. Eventually, I managed to get the number of another entrance out of them, a door that would be safe against fire. It seems to me it was Entrance 20.

**V. T.:** I passed the premier's new proposal to the White House guys. Rutskoi came up to me and asked me to get Interfax to announce that he and the White House leadership were ready to go outside. The next moment, several white sheets were fastened together. But when the flag – if that's the word – was ready, there came the question who would carry it. Rutskoi said that if he did he would definitely be killed. Everyone was silent.

"Are you going to do it?" he asked me. "Send a message to the Kremlin it's you who will be carrying the flag. They know you, so they won't fire."

I said all that to Komissar, and he protested and didn't allow me to go ahead. I was sure though that I wouldn't be shot at, so I picked up the flag and went along.

Developments were really fast, though for me time was moving so slowly there seemed to be 100 and not 24 hours to the day. But let me go through the facts one by one.

I took the white flag and went downstairs, walking slowly in order to enable my colleagues at Interfax to get through to Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin and tell him that those inside the White House were ready for talks, so that Chernomyrdin should give orders to cease fire outside Entrance 20.

When I was downstairs I saw a large group of men in military uniform and armed with assault rifles. They took me for a scout, trained their rifles at me and ordered me to lie on the floor face-down.

For some unclear reason, my attempt to explain that I was carrying a flag of truce and trying to bring peace to everybody was not only rejected but set off an outburst of rage. I received a powerful blow in my waist and fell over. I then had rifles put against my head and throat and was asked how many of my people were holed up on the second floor and were firing back.

As I was lying there on the floor, I tried to explain to them once again why I was there. Then an officer who was being addressed as "Comrade Lieutenant" ordered me to go down into the basement with my arms stretched out in front of me and to persuade men who were inside and whom I couldn't see in the dark to come out.

"If they don't come out or if you try to run off to join them you're all dead," the officer said.

There were frightened unarmed people in the basement. They refused to come out despite all my assurances that they wouldn't be hurt (the lieutenant had given his "officer's word" they wouldn't).

I left the basement.

About ten people were lying on the floor of the lobby inside Entrance 20 with hands behind their heads. They were in civvies. I was laid down next to them. About 20 or 30 minutes later we were ordered to crawl over to where the cloakroom had used to be and lie there motionlessly.

The White House surrendered. Ambulances were waiting their way through the city, hospitals were packed. Television was constantly showing the burning White House. We realized at last that it was all over. We had only one source of anxiety, the whereabouts of Vyacheslav Terekhov

## FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE

**04/10/1993 00:01 RUSSIA & CIS PRESIDENTIAL BULLETIN (Daily, En, Ru)**  
**SPECIAL EDITION**

### YELTSIN SACKS HIS VICE-PRESIDENT, DISMISSES FROM ARMY

President Yeltsin issued a decree relieving Alexander Rutskoi of the vice-presidency and dismissing him from the army for what was described as actions discrediting the honor of the servicemen and incompatible with the officer's duty.

By the same decree, Yeltsin bestowed his duties on the Prime Minister in the event of his resignation, incapacitation or death.



I've had a call from one of our correspondents who had a chance to swap a few words with Khasbulatov. Khasbulatov asked him to report that Terekhov had been shot dead when he was leading people out of the White House with a white flag

Smashing a few windows with their rifles, the riflemen began to fire through them, warning us they would "spray us with fire" if we made any movements behind their backs.

**M.K.:** Eventually the White House surrendered. Ambulances were wailing their way through the city, hospitals were packed. Television was constantly showing the burning White House. We realized at last that it was all over. We had only one source of anxiety, the whereabouts of Vyacheslav Terekhov.

He had been silent since the day before, since he threw the phone down with the words, "I can't avoid this, I'm leading the group out."

I was told that Oleg Shchedrov, one of our former journalists who was by that time working at Reuters, had been phoning in looking for me.

His initial words sent chills down my spine. "I've had a call from one of our correspondents who had a chance to swap a few words with Khasbulatov. Khasbulatov asked him to report that Terekhov had been shot dead when he was leading people out of the White House with a white flag."

My heart sank. I got our closest colleagues together and gave them instructions, speaking rather like a machine, as my mind was refusing to work after that news and several sleepless nights. "Don't say anything to his wife, go round all the hospitals morgues, find the body," I said.

Vyacheslav's wife, however, was persistently trying to get me on the phone, as though she felt things were rough. I asked my colleagues to tell her I was asleep. Meanwhile I was dialing the numbers of services of all kinds trying to trace Terekhov, but no one had seen him either dead or alive or could tell me anything.

## FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE



05/10/1993 12:00 RUSSIA & CIS GENERAL NEWSWIRE (RealTime, En, Ru)

### RUSSIAN PRESIDENT ORDERS ADDITIONAL EMERGENCY STEPS

Russian President Boris Yeltsin ordered additional steps reinforcing emergency rule in Moscow.

The decree declares that these steps are designed to promote state and public security in Moscow in the context of emergency rule and to eliminate the remnants of armed gangs that took part in the October 3 and 4 coup attempt.

The curfew from 23:00 hours October 4 until 5:00 hours October 5 will continue in the nights that follow until the emergency is lifted by the military commandant. Persons who are not directly engaged in enforcing the emergency rule will not be allowed to be on the streets and in other public places unless they have special passes.

05/10/1993 21:00 RUSSIA & CIS GENERAL NEWSWIRE (RealTime, En, Ru)

### DEATH TOLL IN MOSCOW RISES TO 150, BUT THERE MAY BE MORE – SOSKOVETS

The death toll in Moscow has risen to 150. However, the final number may exceed this. This was announced by Russian First Vice-Premier Oleg Soskovets at a briefing on Tuesday after a session of the government's Commission on Operative Issues.

According to Soskovets, the first emergency state night "has brought good results." For instance, as many as 860 people were arrested for violating the emergency state. However, the law enforcement bodies believe that the number could be bigger.

Guys came back who had been visiting hospitals where the wounded had been admitted. Vyacheslav was in none of them. But, thank God, none of the morgues had registered him either. There sprang up some hope, weak as it was, though we realized it would take a while to identify all the dead.

That was the way the day passed. I remember I got away to go somewhere. I returned to the office, went to my room with a terrible sense of devastation, without looking at anyone. I opened the door and was stupefied: there was Vyacheslav Terekhov fast asleep huddled in an armchair in the corner, with a chair under his feet. Bruised all over, dirty, his hair all in a mess, but alive!

**V. T.:** After midday nearly 300 people were led out of the basement. By then it had become clear that nobody would get shot. But all our questions whether they were soldiers and what their unit was if they were would get the same answer, "None of your business, just keep lying there and don't move." Some were saying prayers aloud, others were cursing though it was unclear who they were swearing at. About an hour and a half later we all were told to go down into the basement.

One again I tried to explain to the group leader that I needed to get to the nearest telephone and resume peace talks. But I got no permission. Finally, a command went through the basement for us to get out of the building quietly. As I was walking through an underground corridor, I recognized one of those who had punched me.

When I asked him why I had been treated that way, the soldier said, "Don't judge us too strictly, there was too much hatred."

"Hatred for whom?"

"I don't know. Bad times," he said, glancing at me.

When I got out of the White House, I saw a phone box. Resorting to a trick from my student days, I folded a sheet of paper and pushed it into the coin slot. I got through, described the havoc around the White House, and said I was heading for Interfax.

The young woman I was speaking to, a typist, asked me very sincerely, "Are you alive?"

I laughed despite being in pain and said, "No I'm not. I'm phoning from the other world."

Actually, it wasn't such a silly question at all. It was Khasbulatov who had announced that the truce flag bearer had been killed. The reason was the man to whom my white flag was handed over after being taken away from me was hit by a stray bullet when he was running out of the White House. Some thought it was Terekhov who had been killed. Rumors that I had got on the wrong side of Fate spread through the journalistic community that was covering the tragic events of those days. I even know that some fellow journalists were making calls to Interfax and offering their condolences.

I arrived at the office, went into Komissar's room – he'd gone out somewhere – and fell asleep in an armchair.

Journalists often argue about the nature of their profession. Some believe it's an ordinary job, others are convinced it's an art. In my view, journalism is loyalty to duty plus a bit of luck. I was lucky. I hope you will be as well.

*Journalists often argue about the nature of their profession. Some believe it's an ordinary job, others are convinced it's an art. In my view, journalism is loyalty to duty plus a bit of luck*



# President and correspondent

## how the future president of Azerbaijan acted as an Interfax stringer



Mikhail Komissar,  
Chairman of the Board of  
Directors of Interfax Group

**I had not met Heydar Aliyev until summer 1991 though I had heard a lot about him, of course. In the late 1980s he was what you would call today a crisis manager of the Communist Party top leadership. He was rushed to sort out the most complex issues. Thus in 1986 it was Aliyev who headed the commission investigating the sinking of the Admiral Nakhimov. Interfax wrote much about him but it was mainly journalists who contacted him and our roads never crossed**

**T**hat day, July 19, 1991, I'd only just sat down at my desk when my deputy Vyacheslav Terekhov, head of the correspondent section at the time, burst in very agitated.

"Heydar Aliyev is here. I will now bring him to you," he fired at me. "Which Aliyev?" I was surprised. "The Aliyev," Vyacheslav said and, seeing my bewilderment (Politburo members had never come to our office before), explained that Aliyev had written a letter announcing he was leaving the Communist Party and suggested we publish it. "Will we ask anyone from the party Central Committee to comment on it?" Terekhov asked.

In general, reporting news with third party commentaries was our Interfax style. We tried to supplement each news item with the opinions of opponents or experts so that the information would not remain without a context but would reach the subscriber with explanations of what stood behind it, what a particular event meant, what impact it might have and what could follow.

However, this was a special case. After hearing the details from Terekhov I immediately realized that the Central Committee would try to hush the news up or at least not allow the text itself to be published, but would give a watered-down interpretation.

"No, Vyacheslav," I said. "Let's not take any risks. The news is important in its own right. Let's do it anyway and wait for the reaction." Vyacheslav nodded and came back a minute later, accompanied by Aliyev.

It was the first time I'd seen Aliyev so close up. As far as I remember he was very calm, looked at me narrowing his eyes and asked provocatively: "Well, you'll probably fret, won't you? The consequences may be serious for us. The ideological department of the party's Central Committee is still sorry you were not closed down in January." I was very surprised that Aliyev knew about that. Conservative forces in the Communist Party leadership did try to close us down in January 1991. The pressure was very strong.



Aliyev grinned. "I didn't come here by chance. I checked you out and they told me that you're not the sort who caves in." "You were well-informed. We're putting it out immediately," I said. The news was out in a couple of minutes, and the racket that followed....

Time passed. Many stormy events took place: August 1991, the coup attempt, Gorbachev's resignation, Yeltsin's rise to power, the disintegration of the USSR.

The episode with Aliyev leaving the party was rapidly going down into history. I knew that he had become the leader of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, an exclave of Azerbaijan. But that was a regular event which was reported on the Interfax newswire every day.

Then suddenly in spring 1992 I was told that a special messenger had arrived. I didn't even understand what it meant. We had not dealt with that service earlier.

An officer entered my room, took out a telegram from his briefcase with "Governmental" written in big red letters on it – I had not seen any of them before – and asked me to sign for it. To my surprise the telegram contained information about the situation in Nakhichevan. It was signed "H. Aliyev."

We enthusiastically compiled a report and released it, of course. Our close cooperation with our new "stringer" in Nakhichevan started that day.

This unusual cooperation lasted until Aliyev was elected the President of Azerbaijan. Special messengers arrived almost daily bringing "Governmental" telegrams signed by him. During that time we received and released probably about a hundred reports penned by Aliyev.

Afterwards there were many other meetings, and later the news agency Interfax-Azerbaijan appeared, an initiative that had the Azerbaijani president's strong backing. But that's another story...

It was the first time I'd seen Aliyev so close up. As far as I remember he was very calm, looked at me narrowing his eyes and asked provocatively: "Well, you'll probably fret, won't you?"

Original text of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic Upper House Press Center's statement, dictated and edited by H. Aliyev personally

СООБЩЕНИЕ ПРЕСС-ЦЕНТРА ВЕРХНЕГО СЕДИЩА  
НАХИЧЕВАНСКОЙ АВТОНОМНОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ

Обстановка на границе между Нахичеванской Автономной Республикой и Арменией продолжает оставаться напряженной. Так, по сообщению Министерства внутренних дел Нахичеванской АР, только за последний месяц с территории соседней Армении на территорию автономной республики совершено 7 вооруженных бандитских нападений, в результате нанесен материальный ущерб, исчисляемый десятками миллионов рублей, взяты заложниками четыре жителя автономной республики.

Для осуществления гнусных замыслов армянские боевики не гнушаются ничем, путем шантажа, подкупа, привлекают к преступной деятельности и военнослужащих Советской Армии. Этим преследуется также цель создать конфронтацию между Советской Армией и нахичеванцами, посеять между ними семена недоверия и подозрительности и дестабилизировать тем самым внутреннюю обстановку в автономной республике.

Подтверждением тому события 5 октября 1991 года в селе Гнза Ордубадского района. Вооруженные армянские бандиты, захватив машину с военнослужащими воинской части 02444, дислоцированной на территории Нахичеванской Автономной Республики, капитаном Милевским С.И., рядовым Тухан Г.Ф. и младшим сержантом Слез, использовали машину и последнего для похищения жителя этого села Аббасова.

12 октября 1991 года около 23 часов на железнодорожной станции Ордубад Нахичеванской Автономной Республики неизвестные ~~лица~~ <sup>лица</sup> ~~и~~ <sup>и</sup> ~~некоторые~~ <sup>некоторые</sup> ~~лица~~ <sup>лица</sup> задержали

2.

двух подозрительных лиц. Они оказались лейтенант Сучков Сергей Беняминович и прапорщик Хердик Олег Федорович – военнослужащие воинской части 73879, расположенной в городе Ереван Республики Армения.

При досмотре вещей задержанных в портфеле-дипломате были обнаружены 2 взрывных устройства с часовым механизмом и 47 аммонов, деньги в сумме 5 тысяч рублей.

Предварительным следствием установлено, что указанные военнослужащие подослали в Нахичеванскую Автономную Республику армянскими боевиками из города Ереван. Бандиты снабдили их взрывчатками, помогли незаконно проникнуть на территорию автономной республики с тем, чтобы осуществить ~~незаконный акт, не являющийся военным делом~~ <sup>террористический акт</sup> ~~на территории~~ <sup>в городе</sup> ~~на территории~~ <sup>в городе</sup> Нахичевана. За это военнослужащим было обещано денежное вознаграждение.

Из показаний Сучкова С.В. установлено также, что он, находясь на военной службе в городе Ереван, регулярно продавал лицам, занимавшимся бандитизмом, боевые гранаты и патроны, вырученные деньги делил с командиром роты воинской части.

По указанному факту Прокуратурой Нахичеванской Автономной Республики возбуждено уголовное дело и проводится тщательное расследование.

город Нахичевань, 15 октября 1991 года



# How we were rescuing Gorbachev, or how Interfax prevented Coup No.2



Mikhail Komissar,  
Chairman of the Board of  
Directors of Interfax Group

Few people know that the abortive coup in August 1991 could well have been followed by another in November the same year, which Interfax happened to play a key role in disrupting.

...Slightly more than two months had passed since the August 1991 coup attempt. The situation in the country was very turbulent, and, as we now know in retrospect, the end of a great power was looming large in the shape of dozens of various omens

Certainly, the focus was on the standoff between Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. More and more people who were losing their last vestiges of faith in the Communist ideals supported the latter. But the state system was under immense strain in directly opposite ways as well: those who wanted to preserve the Communist rule at any cost were obstructing political and economic liberalization and lambasting Gorbachev. These forces had made a clumsy attempt to overthrow Gorbachev in August, but the formal quelling of the coup did not change their resolve.

In the early fall of 1991, rumors that some troops were moving and some military units were being brought to Moscow surfaced quite often. They were routinely denied, and the people almost got used to them, especially considering that Gorbachev's main battlefield was certainly the rising Russian statehood and the unstable federal foundations.

...In early November 1991 – the Interfax report in question was dated November 5 – I had been in the agency office since the morning. Suddenly I was told that Viktor Ilyukhin, a high-ranking official from the Soviet Prosecution Service, wanted to talk to me on the phone. He headed the department for the supervision of the enforcement of state security laws and was a member of the Soviet Prosecution Service board and a senior aide to the prosecutor general. I knew him, as I had interviewed him several times before, but we did not maintain any special relations.

“Mikhail Vitalyevich, I have an informational surprise for you,” Ilyukhin told me. “I respect your agency, and the whole world knows you now,” he said, clearly referring to the broad publicity we gained by covering the August 1991 events. “And I need to say something to the world. Send a messenger to me please.”

Looking forward to sensational information – journalists often find something of interest at the Prosecution Service – I sent my assistant Yekaterina Akopyan to him.

She came back in about an hour and suggested that this might be something unusual. She told me she had been met at the entrance to the Prosecutor General's Office building and was immediately escorted to Ilyukhin's office. He received her right away, asked her about our agency's resources and clients, and handed her a big sealed envelope with the Soviet symbol and big letters on it, which read, ‘The Prosecution Service of the Soviet

Union'. Before saying goodbye, Ilyukhin stressed: "Mr. Komissar should not worry, this is not disinformation."

Intrigued by these words, I opened the envelope and was petrified. I had several sheets of paper with typewritten texts in front of me. The first page was a copy of a short but quite impressive letter dated the same day, November 5, signed by Ilyukhin and addressed to Vadim Bakatin, then head of the Inter-Republican Security Service (this was how the still powerful KGB was re-branded following the August coup attempt). "I am sending you a resolution on opening a criminal case against M.S. Gorbachev under Article 64 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and other materials. I am asking you to organize a thorough investigation to be handled by investigators from your service. The attachment includes 15 pages. V.I. Ilyukhin, head of the department for the supervision of the enforcement of state security laws."

It is easy to understand what I felt at that moment. If this was true, this was certainly explosive. Gorbachev was still the leader of a great power, and although we know now that its days were numbered, nobody could have imagined that at the time. Just think of it: an official from the Prosecutor General's Office, not the highest but certainly not the lowest, opens a criminal case against the Soviet president. And on what charges! Nothing of the sort had happened in Soviet history yet. Even the Khrushchev case was different.

The high treason charges brought against Gorbachev probably made just as strong an impression on us as Lavrenty Beria's arrest or the unmasking of Josef Stalin's personality cult on previous generations.

This story, however, also had another aspect.

Many of my colleagues and I were immensely grateful to Gorbachev for turning our country toward democracy and for the fact that, under his leadership, we finally started getting rid of our fear of the state, which seemed to have been in the Soviet people's genes. For all our criticism of Gorbachev, we knew that he would not shed blood and that nobody would get arrested for having a different opinion under him.

Unable to believe my eyes, I was looking through an attached resolution on opening a criminal case, which was dated the previous day, November 4.

It provided detailed analysis of what Ilyukhin presented as violations committed by the State Council of the USSR, which had recognized Latvia's, Lithuania's, and Estonia's independence on September 6. "These acts formalized the secession of the said republics from the USSR and a significant adjustment of the latter's territory," the preamble said. It was followed by several pages of what was intended to legally explain why the State Council led by Gorbachev had violated Soviet laws and, finally, a resolution that said, "Initiate criminal prosecution of Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev on charges stated in Article 64 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (high treason)."

"Here it is," I thought. "Looks like they want to use us to start Coup No. 2 to topple Gorbachev."

What's more, this was certainly not being done in favor of the democratic forces consolidating around Yeltsin but in the interests of those who had unsuccessfully attempted the coup two months before.

I convened some of my closest colleagues and associates. I remember there was Vyacheslav Terekhov, Renat Abdullin, Andrei Martynov, and probably someone else. We were all shocked. But we were not sure that we understood everything clearly. On the one hand, this could have been the start of a new coup d'etat, and for some reason we were chosen to

"Mikhail Vitalyevich, I have an informational surprise for you," Ilyukhin told me. "I respect your agency, and the whole world knows you now," he said. "And I need to say something to the world. Send a messenger to me please"

1. Mikhail Gorbachev, the former Soviet president, at a press conference at the Interfax Central Office in November 2007  
 2. A. Volsky, Head of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE), and M. Komissar at a press conference at the Interfax Central Office in Moscow in May 2001



The high treason charges brought against Gorbachev probably made just as strong an impression on us as Lavrenty Beria's arrest or the unmasking of Josef Stalin's personality cult on previous generations

pull the trigger. We could imagine more or less vividly what was to happen. Influential security and law enforcement bodies and the heads of the key agencies would declare their disobedience to the head of state against whom a criminal prosecution was opened, especially considering the high treason charges, which was really a big deal in this country. How can you obey such a person? Why should you honor your oath? And then something like a new state of emergency committee would be established to defend the country, make order in it, and, of course, punish all those who deserve it.

We thought that, if this explanation was right, then, according to someone's plan, we were to serve as a transmitter of an idea that the Soviet Union was being led by a criminal, who would be tried for high treason. The following elements of this scenario were quite easy to predict, but we were unlikely to have anything to do with them. We were only to start all this.

Then we began analyzing why we were chosen for such a 'joyful' mission. It was more or less clear. We were a channel having a unique clientele: the leading world and Soviet media outlets, the governments of the major countries, the Soviet leadership, and so on. They thought we were so keen on sensations that we would swallow this bait like a gift from above.

But there could have been another explanation to this affair. What if this was disinformation that some of Gorbachev's high-ranking opponents were trying to circulate via our



agency? After the August coup attempt, we did not view this as something implausible. In this case, launching this fake report through our channels, they would have made a commotion all around the world, and then the Prosecutor General's Office leadership would have simply disavowed it (after all, Ilyukhin was not even a deputy prosecutor general). This would have made us look like absolute idiots who did not even try to verify such unbelievable information.

We began to think whom we could approach for explanations or comments. But what if we contacted someone who was part of the plot? The August coup attempt showed that very serious people could be involved in such things. Ilyukhin addressed his letter to Vadim Bakatin, and we could not rule out that even he, one of Gorbachev's closest associates, could have been among the conspirators. Anything could have been presumed at that time.

And then someone – if I am not mistaken, this was Terekhov – came up with the idea: 'Volsky!'

There was something in this. Arkady Volsky was one of the most influential and worthy people in Gorbachev's entourage, a former aide to Yuri Andropov during his brief leadership, and a man of a firm character and a brilliant and flexible mind. He was able to defend his point of view and was not afraid of dissenting and crossing anybody's path (for which, by the way, he once fell into disfavor and was exiled from the Kremlin's Olympus first to Nagorno-Karabakh and then to the Scientific and Industrial Union of the USSR, an organization tailored specifically for him). Volsky had shielded us half a year before, when he prevented our persecution by some Politburo members from growing into our elimination. Since then, we had become friends, and I had met or talked to him on the phone nearly every day. I trusted this man absolutely, and, what mattered even more, I knew he was always in the know of all the Kremlin intrigues.

I called him and told him that I needed to see him right away. Naturally, there was no problem with that, and just an hour later, I was sitting in his office on Old Square.

Volsky listened to me very carefully and took my information very seriously. I remember him thumbing Ilyukhin's documents for a while, and then he delivered his verdict.

"You must talk about this to Gorbachev. Directly. Nobody else can be involved in this."

This perplexed me. First, I still hoped that Volsky would call this trash and an Ilyukhin PR-stunt. Second, I did not know Gorbachev personally and could hardly imagine coming to his office and talking to him, especially on such an unusual matter. Before I had come to Volsky, I assumed that, even if he considered this information important, he would share it with Gorbachev himself. But, for reasons unknown to me, Volsky decided to act in a different way.

Ignoring my perplexity, he picked up a handset and, as far as I could understand, talked to Gorbachev's secretary or aide.

"Please put me through to Mikhail Sergeyevich [Gorbachev]."

Perhaps he was told that Gorbachev was busy, but Volsky showed his character and remained adamant.

"Tell him this is urgent and extremely important."

Shortly afterwards, Gorbachev apparently answered. I will never forget what Volsky then said. Without any preambles and explanations, he said, almost demanding: "Mikhail Sergeyevich, it is my request that you urgently meet with Mikhail Komissar, the head of Interfax. He is at my office now, and he has some information of extreme importance."

"Here it is," I thought. "Looks like they want to use us to start Coup No. 2 to topple Gorbachev." What's more, this was certainly not being done in favor of the democratic forces consolidating around Yeltsin but in the interests of those who had unsuccessfully attempted the coup two months before



What struck me most of all was the understanding of what we suspected but what we still refused to believe: Gorbachev and his people knew nothing about the high treason charges that had been officially brought against him

Predictably enough, this proposal hardly filled the Soviet president with enthusiasm and he probably did not express any particular interest in meeting with an unknown fellow from some young news agency. And then Volsky showed his worth just as he could.

“Mikhail Sergeyevich, do I often ask you for anything? If I’m telling you that you must receive Komissar, then I take responsibility for my words. You must receive him.”

Volsky hung up, looked at me with his particular piercing gaze, in which – surprisingly to me – there was not a trace of his usual smile (he always smiled either with his eyes or with his lips at anything and anybody).

“Okay now. Mikhail Sergeyevich is waiting for you at...” (he named a precise time, which I unfortunately do not remember now).

Before saying goodbye, Volsky suddenly warned me: “They might follow you, and they could hunt for the documents, too. After all, we don’t know the whole game.”

When he called this a game, I tried to joke about all this, but Volsky did not share the joke and even got mad at me, which had never happened between us before.

“Don’t you understand what people you are messing with? Do you have a car?” he snapped.

I nodded (there was no point in explaining that we were leasing an old Moskvich driven by its owner). “Can you take anyone with you to give the impression you are not alone?” Volsky asked.

I promised to do so.

Years later, when I asked Volsky why he did not allot his car and his bodyguards to me, he replied seriously: “If you’d been followed, they’d have understood everything had they seen my car and my men. Otherwise, who cared why you visited me?”

I returned to the office, and we made copies of the documents and discussed the way the situation could develop. I was told that there were several calls from Ilyukhin, but my friends made up some convincing excuse why I was away (Thank God, it was still a pretty long time before the era of cell-phones making it impossible to hide from unwanted calls).

My colleagues and I were quite alarmed, or, to tell the truth, frightened. It was not exactly thrilling to be in the center of a mysterious cobweb in a game with such influential opponents not in a movie but in reality.

Interfax’s security service – it can be admitted now – was comprised of moonlighting policemen, who would come to the office in civilian clothing with official weapons. Thankfully they never had to use them, but I warned them all before hiring them that, if something happened they were to fire warning shots (in the air) and we would reward them and protect them from their bosses.

We would hire only those who agreed to these conditions. We did have something to be worried about: apart from discontented freaks of all sorts, there were enough people eyeing our computers, telephones, and other stuff as well. Such were the times.

So, I picked one of the security guards and told him that we would have to deliver a very important document to the Communist Party’s Central Committee and that we could be attacked on our way there.

“Are you prepared to shoot?” I asked him. “If anybody attacks you we’ll do it,” he said, calmly.

This is how we traveled to Old Square: some clunker of a car leased by the agency with a driver, carrying me with a file in my hands and a bodyguard holding a pistol ready to shoot and anxiously looking out of the window in the rear seats.

...This was the first time that I visited the legendary corridors of power on Old Square. As far as I remember, Gorbachev's secretary had already been waiting for me and led me to his office quite soon. Gorbachev's aide for domestic policy Georgy Shakhnazarov, whom I had known a little bit, was also sitting in a chair near the table.

Gorbachev invited me to take a seat at a side table, in front of Shakhnazarov.

"Well, what have you got there?" Gorbachev asked me sort of derisively, as if hinting that I was distracting him from some more important things because of Volsky's whim.

I told him the whole story in detail. Gorbachev smiled incredulously.

"What? A criminal case against me? High treason?"

It was as if he wanted to say, "Hey, man, are you crazy?"

What struck me most of all was the understanding of what we suspected but what we still refused to believe: Gorbachev and his people knew nothing about the high treason charges that had been officially brought against him. The special services and other channels had failed again for some reason.

Gorbachev and Shakhnazarov studied the documents, then the president turned to a huge switchboard, which captured my attention by its many buttons.

"Mikhail Sergeyevich, please, don't mention us by name. After all, you have a lot of channels to get these documents, but we don't want to fall out with those people," I said.

Considering the twist this affair was assuming, fame was the last thing we needed. In fact, we risked acquiring quite influential ill-wishers capable of significantly obstructing our work and complicating our lives.

Gorbachev nodded and pushed one button. Someone from the Prosecutor General's Office top brass answered. Prosecutor General Nikolai Trubin was away at the time, and so it must

Considering the twist this affair was assuming, fame was the last thing we needed. In fact, we risked acquiring quite influential ill-wishers capable of significantly obstructing our work and complicating our lives

**M. Gorbachev and M. Komissar at the Interfax Central Office in Moscow, September 1996**



Pushing different buttons on the switchboard and listening to reports from military commanders, he put the Moscow Military District on alert, ordered that a number of Interior Ministry units be notified, and advised someone from the KGB leadership “to be more watchful

have been one of his lieutenants. Gorbachev launched an angry tirade at him, something like: “What on earth are the Prosecutor General’s Office heads doing while some petty department head can open a criminal case against the president?” Then he demanded proper measures be taken immediately and that Ilyukhin’s decision be reversed.

And then Gorbachev did something that probably impressed me most of all. Pushing different buttons on the switchboard and listening to reports from military commanders, he put the Moscow Military District on alert, ordered that a number of Interior Ministry units be notified, and advised someone from the KGB leadership “to be more watchful.”

Then Gorbachev started walking around his office, debating with his virtual opponents aloud and muttering something like: “They don’t know what they’re doing, they will break up the whole country to pieces.”

Then he returned to the switchboard and asked his secretary to put him through to Boris Yeltsin, who had become almost a fully autonomous leader of a new Russia at the time. These two people, who played a key role in modern Russian history, were in a state of permanent conflict, which sometimes turned quite bitter and sometimes subsided – at least seemingly. One of such apparent truces followed Gorbachev’s return from his isolation in Foros, Crimea, and their relations in the early November 1991 – just a month and a half before the end of the USSR – were apparently more or less positive. At least they were on speaking terms.

Yeltsin’s characteristic voice answered in the speakerphone. Gorbachev started telling him the whole story, glancing at me and Shakhnazarov from time to time: “Can you imagine what they came up with?” I was eagerly listening to the conversation between the two political leaders, which sounded quite friendly to an outsider. Suddenly, to my horror, Gorbachev said addressing Yeltsin’s voice in the loudspeaker: “And who do you think they wanted to use to start all this?”

I began waving my arms desperately, but nothing could stop him.

“They planted this on Interfax to circulate this around the world. Komissar is here right now.”

Then he finally saw my face, which probably turned as white as a sheet, remembered my request, and changed the subject. Fortunately, Yeltsin, who, by the way, knew both me and Interfax quite well, did not say anything to Gorbachev back – perhaps his thoughts were occupied by something else.

...Before parting, Gorbachev approached me and said warmly: “Thanks. I won’t forget it.”

Years later, after his resignation, we made friends and are still on good terms. But we have never talked about our first meeting. When I reminded him of this story recently, Gorbachev paused for a while and then shook his head. “Don’t remember. You know how much was happening those days, something was crumbling every day then.” Georgy Shakhnazarov told me in the end: “Mikhail, we are in your debt now.” I immediately recalled the genie stories and asked for an exclusive commentary on this affair. “It will leak out tomorrow anyway, look how many people have been involved.” “Shakhnazarov looked at me with his wise eyes and smiled, sounding like a real genie: “I have told you we are in your debt. Come down tomorrow and you will have an interview.”

And Gorbachev gave us an interview the next day – a rare occasion for him – in which he confirmed our guesses. “The feeler that Ilyukhin sent out was apparently aimed at fomenting nationalistic sentiments, which should have given a chance to the reactionary forces to replay the August coup attempt.”

This story had another development, which I would call kind of weird. Roy Romer, the governor of Colorado, visited Moscow several weeks later. We had been introduced to each other when we were opening our U.S. branch, Interfax-America, in Denver in the early 1991. Someone arranged our brief meeting with Romer at his office then. Now, while visiting Moscow, he came by and suddenly told me that he would like to meet Gorbachev, something that the entire world admiring the Soviet leader wished at that time. We really wanted to do Romer a favor, hoping that he would help us develop our business in the U.S., which was pretty naive of us, as it turned out later.

In other words, I called Shakhnazarov. Knowing all ins and outs in the Kremlin machinery, he certainly understood the inequality of ranks between the governor of a remote Colorado and the president of the USSR. However, all he said was: "OK, if you are asking for this, Gorbachev will receive him."

A day later, the governor of Colorado who nobody had heard about had a tete-a-tete meeting with Gorbachev, perhaps creating a real puzzle for future generations of historians exploring the decline of the Soviet Union and trying to find out what stood behind that meeting.

Ilyukhin was discharged from the Soviet Prosecution Service two days later. Now he is a State Duma member representing the Russian Communist Party, a deputy chairman of the Duma constitutional legislation committee and a member of the Duma anti-corruption commission.

Shakhnazarov died in 2001. I tried once to briefly tell this story to his son, a renowned moviemaker and director of the Mosfilm studio, the author of a number of films dealing with the last moments of the USSR based on made-up plots. However, he did not show much interest in this.

Volsky died in September 2006. We were friends up to his last days, met a lot and worked to reform the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs and make it more business-oriented. In all these years, only once did he give me a surreptitious but a charming wink and ask all of a sudden: "And do you remember how we were rescuing Mikhail Gorbachev?"

A day later, the governor of Colorado who nobody had heard about had a tete-a-tete meeting with Gorbachev, perhaps creating a real puzzle for future generations of historians exploring the decline of the Soviet Union and trying to find out what stood behind that meeting

## ILYUKHIN'S RESPONSE TO THE ARTICLE



**The following is a response by Viktor Ilyukhin, a participant in the 1991 events, to Mikhail Komissar's article "How We Were Rescuing Gorbachev", published in the special issue of the Your Interfax magazine (No 10, September 2009)**

**"I attentively read your article about my initiating criminal charges against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. I thank you for the objective evaluation of the steps I took on November 4, 1991..."**

**"I think it will be interesting for many readers to learn more about the events you describe and the reaction of Mikhail Gorbachev to these criminal charges. I did not know, for instance, that he had ordered a high level of alert for the Moscow military district. I also knew nothing about numerous orders and high-level meetings. That is very interesting.**

**"I wish you further success."**

**Deputy,  
State Duma  
Viktor Ilyukhin**

# Interfax in war zones

## war reporters' experiences



Georgy Gulia,  
Executive Director  
Interfax Group

**Interfax was born at a time when, unfortunately, hotspots began to spring up in various parts of the former Soviet Union. We had our correspondents in all of them – Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Tajikistan, Chechnya. Risking their lives, they were providing the world with news from war zones**

**I**t is crucial in such situations to abandon any romanticism. War is brutality, and the life of a correspondent in no way differs from the life of a soldier, at least in the sense that bullets and shells don't distinguish between them. In the late 1980s and early 1990s we were learning the skills of war correspondents, learning how to survive and how to use most unbelievable means of communication to send our information to our editors in Moscow.

We had our correspondent Boris Gevorkian in Nagorno-Karabakh and Vakhtang Lomtadze in Georgia, and the author of these lines as well as Leonid Zhukov and Vitaly Dzhibuti working in Chechnya and Abkhazia. Practically all our editors and correspondents saw the first Chechen war, taking turns to visit Grozny, Chechnya's capital. When federal forces moved into Chechnya in 1994, it was Vitaly Dzhibuti who was the first to report it. To count pieces of armor that he was able to see, he would put ticks in his notepad. Then, by sheer accident, he found a satellite phone in the house of Chechen Prime Minister Salambek Khadzhiev in the village of Znamenskoye.

"Is it working?" Vitaly asked.

"What is it? They've sent it in from Moscow but didn't say what it was for," the Chechen premier replied.

But it was owing to this find that the world knew that the war had started.

It needs to be said that, when Interfax had emerged, many officials were simply unaware how a news agency worked.

In the early nineties, Vitaly Dzhibuti worked with the then defense minister, Pavel Grachyov, and was the only journalist to accompany the minister on all his business trips. Naturally, both were always on the same plane. Grachyov made a point of seeing all the news on television. Before each flight, Vitaly was able to put several questions to the minister and report important statements for the newswire.

Grachyov would then sit down in front of a television and exclaim, "My word! How did they find all that out? I've only just said that to Vitaly, and here they are quoting me in the news already!"

I think there still are some senior officials today who don't quite realize what we are all about.

In the nineties, Interfax was the first to report the start of the war in Abkhazia, the capture of Gagra by Abkhaz forces in October 1992, and the end of the war in September 1993.

And I was in Grozny in August 1996, when Aslan Maskhadov's separatist forces had taken the Abkhaz capital, and Sergei Stepashin, the newsmaker, and I flew on a burning aircraft.



Shortly before that, Interfax was the sole media outlet to be present at lengthy talks in Nazran between Stepashin and Maskhadov. Every hour, absolutely exclusive information would appear on the agency's newswire. Finally, Maskhadov lost his patience.

"We have evidence that there is a correspondent for the ITAR-TASS agency in this room. We demand that he be removed immediately," he said.

"Aslan, I swear to you there is no ITAR-TASS correspondent in the room," said Stepashin.

The talks resumed and news kept flowing to Moscow.

During an interval, I asked Stepashin, "You had to lie to him, didn't you?"

"What do you mean 'lie'?" Stepashin retorted. "How can I lie? I told him the absolute truth. You're not ITAR-TASS, are you? You're Interfax."

But let me go back to our flight from Grozny.

In mid-August, after ten days of battles for the Chechen capital, the Moscow delegation

that had arrived for talks but found itself in the middle of hell, was trying to get out of Chechnya.

A rather small aircraft that belonged to the Emergency Situations Ministry was miraculously able to land at Severny Airport, which was under attack from all angles. Sergei Stepashin, Vyacheslav Mikhailov, who was then minister for nationalities, parliamentary deputy Vladimir Zorin and I rushed on board.

Inside the plane we saw Chechen President Doku Zavgayev, who sat there reading a Moscow newspaper a week old whose front page bore a huge picture of him and a bold-type headline saying, "Zavgayev Flees Grozny."

After a short run, the plane took off and went up sharply, almost square to the ground, trying to avoid having to fly low over the mountains. But the plane, apparently, was unable to withstand this sort of exertion: the cabin filled with smoke, and the plastic lining of the wall caught fire just like paper. One of the crewmembers was tearing off pieces of lining with wires attached to them,

The life of a correspondent in no way differs from the life of a soldier, at least in the sense that bullets and shells don't distinguish between them. In the late 1980s and early 1990s we were learning the skills of war correspondents, learning how to survive and how to use most unbelievable means of communication to send our information to our editors in Moscow

Left to right: Georgy Gulia, Artur Chilingarov, a State Duma deputy, and Viktor Chernomyrdin, the Russian president's special representative for the settlement of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, before leaving for Belgrade, Vnukovo Airport, Moscow, April 1999



1. Mikhail Shevtsov and I. Nazarova, head of a mobile army hospital, Kabul, December 2001
2. Left to right: Renat Abdullin, Secretary of the Russian Security Council Alexander Lebed, and Georgy Gulia at the Interfax headquarters in Moscow, June 1996
3. Georgy Gulia and fellow journalists on board a helicopter en route from Ingushetia to Chechnya, 1996



You should know all that is happening and try to report only as much of it as to avoid being put before the firing squad and earn enough trust to make people want to talk to you the next day

and struggling to put out the fire with an extinguisher.

Eventually the fire was extinguished.

"We can try to return to Grozny," the captain suggested to us.

Everyone shook their heads to say no.

"We can then try to make it to Moscow," the captain said.

"Is there any vodka here?" the respectable members of the delegation asked.

"Nearly a whole box of it. We knew where we were going to."

"To Moscow then!"

When we got to Moscow, it was a while before we wanted to leave the plane, which, it had turned out, didn't need too many wires to be able to fly.

People often ask what a war journalist's highest skills are. I think this is what they are: you should know all that is happening and try to report only as much of it as to avoid being put before the firing squad and earn enough trust to make people want to talk to you the next day.

When Maskhadov's forces began to storm Grozny, Sergei Stepashin asked me to go into the office in Khankala, near Grozny, of the commander of federal forces.

"Just sit there, look and listen. You know what you may report, don't you. We trust you," Stepashin said.

So there I sat and, to my terror, the entire hopelessness of the situation came home to me.

Here is just one of the things I remember.

The commander received a report that the command headquarters of either Maskhadov or Gelayev had been spotted in one of the buildings on Kabardinskaya Street.

I expected an immediate strike at that building. But that didn't happen. The commander took off his heavy army boots, picked up a magnifying glass, knelt on the map of Grozny that covered nearly the entire floor of what was a pretty large room, and apparently started looking for Kabardinskaya Street.

About fifteen minutes later, a major-general looked into the room. Obeying a gesture by the commander, he also took off his shoes and knelt on the map next to his superior.

About twenty minutes later, four people were crawling over the map, the chief of counterintelligence and another general having joined the other two.

I was watching the scene in silence.

About an hour had gone by. "We should call one of the local people, either Zavgayev or Koshman [Chechnya's prime minister]. They'll be able to tell us," said the commander.

"It's a new name," Zavgayev said on the phone. "The street got it while Dudayev was still in power, about two years ago."

"This isn't the latest map, then?" the commander asked, addressing the counterintelligence chief. The next moment, everyone in the room had their eyes fixed on the corner of the map where "Grozny in 1956" was printed in bold type.

That's how the war was waged, but, naturally, that particular piece of news never appeared on the wire.

After that there was Alexander Lebed, there were daily nighttime flights to Chechnya to hold talks, there were Ivan Rybkin, secretary of the Russian Security Council, and his deputy Boris Berezovsky, and then there was a new war in the Caucasus, and, again, it was Interfax that was the first to report the start of it in August 1999.

At that time, the then Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin arrived in Tatarstan by boat along the Volga River, and it was there he was told that Chechen militants had made a raid into Dagestan.

"This must be put on the wire," he said to me as we were standing on an uninhabited stretch of one of the banks of the great Russian river.

"But how?" I asked. The place was naturally too isolated to be reached by mobile phone.

"Try that," the premier said, pointing to a lonely police car.

At that moment I realized how serious the Russian premier was being. Using a walkie-talkie, one of the policemen inside the car, his uniform wet through with perspiration, managed to put me through to Interfax after a relay through communications lines.

After the second Chechen war, where a lot of work was done by our correspondents Alvi Karimov, Alexei Meshkov and Mikhail Shevtsov, there came a time when it seemed that wars had finally ceased to be the main subject of journalism and that an era of armchairs and polished floors had set in.

But then came August 2008.

It turned out that in the early hours of August 8, Interfax became the only place to be receiving all information about that new war in the Caucasus.

Soon after midnight on August 7, I had a call on my mobile from the South Ossetian president, Eduard Kokoity.

"They're storming Tskhinvali! Get that reported! It's a war! Call [Sergei] Bagapsh [the president of Abkhazia] as well, tell him!" Kokoity yelled.

At quarter past midnight, Interfax put a news alert out. It is considered that was the moment the war in South Ossetia began.

That night we were not only journalists but also communications officers who were keeping Kokoity in contact with Bagapsh, North Ossetian President Teimuraz Mamsurov and various other politicians.

Eduard Kokoity would call us every fifteen minutes or so, reporting frontline developments. None of the calls would last more than a minute – the Georgians would immediately locate the source of the signal, and their artillery would fire at the area.

That night we had our youngest correspondent, Alexei Shtokal, in Tskhinvali, and several days later our mentor Vyacheslav Terekhov, who was nearly seventy by then, was among the Abkhaz troops who were the first to move into the Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia. As usual, he was the first journalist to be there.

After the second Chechen war, where a lot of work was done by our correspondents Alvi Karimov, Alexei Meshkov and Mikhail Shevtsov, there came a time when it seemed that wars had finally ceased to be the main subject of journalism and that an era of armchairs and polished floors had set in. But then came August 2008



# Soviet business

## how we bridged the unbridgeable



Vladimir Gerasimov,  
Executive Director,  
General Director, Financial  
& Business Information  
Services, Interfax Group



Yuri Pogorely,  
Deputy General Director,  
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**There was no sex in the USSR, but that was not all. There wasn't the sort of journalism geared towards the real needs of businessmen and financial market players either. Interfax started to publish its first business news bulletins in 1990 to provide foreign businessmen with information about developments in the Soviet economy. At first, the main problems were a huge deficit of news worthy of the term "business news" and the difficulty of describing what was happening in the USSR so that a Westerner could more or less understand it**

**S**oviet enterprises were not accustomed to talking about themselves, and any information, however scant or incoherent, could be obtained only from joint ventures, foreign companies, and new market-based structures that were mushrooming at the time.

"Why do you want to know that for?" This is what a journalist seeking information about investment, projects or operating results would hear from a factory director.

However, even if you could dig up some information, giving a full and coherent picture of what was going on would often be even more difficult. And even if you could find answers to the 'what', 'where' and 'when' questions, then the sacramental questions like 'what all this means' and 'how much all this costs' remained unanswered in most cases.

For instance, even if news mentioned rubles, foreign-currency rubles, or transferable rubles, they had absolutely different official and unofficial exchange rates (from 60 kopecks to 30 rubles) and therefore could not easily be converted into a foreign currency.

The fledgling Russian businesses, full of enthusiasm and looking forward to the amaz-

ing market prospects that would open up, would announce incredible investment projects worth hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars. So as not to make Western readers laugh, Interfax for some time followed an internal 'rule' to reject any reports on projects involving billion-dollar investments as fantasy.

Russian businessmen giving interviews avoided talking about concrete things as much as they could. In certain cases, we could not report sensational news about Western investments because nobody could pronounce the name of a Western partner. "Brat Whitney" or "Brother Whitney" ('brat' being the Russian for 'brother') was how one newsmaker once tried to describe a well-known aircraft engine maker.

On the other hand, stock exchanges were a guaranteed source of activity. Reports from trading floors about sales of pants, aircraft, eggs, or disposable lighters were coming from all over Russia.

All this murky (at least at the beginning) information flow ran against the requirements set at our agency, which corresponded to established Western reporting standards. News was sent for verification if it



was impossible to understand the status of a project being reported on and tell whether this was just a bold desire or a fact based on a formal contract; or if, for instance, a Russian representative was talking about plans by some international corporation to invest a couple of billion dollars in the USSR but Interfax could not obtain confirmation of this from its partner.

As Interfax gained more knowledge and experience, it started expanding its range of business information products. From early 1991, we started issuing a weekly publication on foreign trade, then a daily English-language bulletin called Soviet Business Report, and, starting in the second half of 1991, specialized publications on oil and gas, agriculture, and the banking sector. Each of these products made its own contribution to 'glasnost' in the economic sphere. Almost each issue in 1991 reported sensational data that was key to evaluating the market, for instance, on the aggregate capacity of grain elevators in the USSR, or on oil and gas deposits, or on volumes of grain purchases, or on the amount of gold reserves remaining at the State Bank – all this information had been classified only a short time before.

The early and mid-1990s will be remembered for bloody interethnic conflicts and political turmoil. Less bloody but no less bru-

tal warfare began in the Russian business sector at the time. You need only recall the war between Russian metallurgy companies and their former partner, Britain's Trans World Group. This was a long battle, which Interfax correspondents were observing as if from within. Our headlines were similar to military reports: 'Novolipetsk Steel Stops Metal Shipments to TWG', 'TWG Threatens Seizure of Assets Abroad', 'Metallurgists Consolidating against TWG', and so on.

At that time, Interfax subscribers – mainly major global companies looking closely at the gigantic market and industrial potential of a new Russia and the other CIS countries – focused on three key areas, namely oil, metals and finances. Interfax responded to this by establishing first sector-specific news agencies in Russia dealing with oil, metallurgy, and financial information. Our correspondents witnessed the formation of Russia's oil sector, the emergence of new oil companies, the redistribution of their spheres of influence, and the re-alignment of the market. The most epic story was probably that of Slavneft, for which powerful oil clans were competing. The opponents actively used PR technology by launching balloons carrying advertisements or painting streetcars in their colors. There were real bouts in courts, in offices, and then at the auction at which –

Russian businessmen giving interviews avoided talking about concrete things as much as they could. In certain cases, we could not report sensational news about Western investments because nobody could pronounce the name of a Western partner

## FROM THE INTERFAX ARCHIVE: THE AGENCY'S FIRST BUSINESS NEWS STORIES

**27/12/1990 22:18 RUSSIA & CIS GENERAL NEWSWIRE (RealTime, En, Ru)**

**ON THE FIRST DAY OF SALE MENATEP GIVES RISE TO A WAVE OF DEMAND FOR ITS SHARES AMONG ENTERPRISES AND INDIVIDUALS**

The banking association Menatep launched on December 27 an unrestricted sale of its shares, unprecedented for the USSR, to all wishing to buy them, including individuals. The sale attracted an influx of buyers at once. As Interfax learned at Menatep, the amounts of money invested in the shares range from 500 rubles, the minimal cost of a share sold to individuals, to 200,000 rubles. Some enterprises said they intend to buy Menatep shares in amounts of up to 20 million rubles.

Menatep is planning to sell 300 million ruble worth of securities.



Growing and declining markets, mergers and liquidations of companies – all this has been happening before our very eyes, and therefore our readers have been the first to learn about this. And we will make sure they always are

surprisingly – friendship won the day. And we were the first to report this.

The 1998 financial crisis prompted mobile communications operators to turn a once elite service into a mass commodity. This marked the triumph of the 'new economy', one not based on privatized Soviet assets. A specialized news service dealing with the telecommunications market was set up at Interfax at precisely that time. Interfax's profile divisions, which had matured in the 2000s, provided first-hand information on key reforms, for example the pension and insurance reforms, the reform of the Unified Energy System electricity monopoly, and the leading Russian companies' mass entry into the global stock market.

"Who's who in the new economy?" This was the main question of the time. We answered it by setting up SPARK, Russia's largest information and analytical database of companies, which first provided information about 1 million, then about 4.5 million companies. Now, this figure has topped 12 million, as SPARK has consolidated information on all companies and individual private businessmen officially registered in Russia. Then we started providing information on Ukrainian and Kazakh companies. Growing and declining markets, mergers and liquidations of companies – all this has been happening before our very eyes, and therefore our readers have been the first to learn about this. And we will make sure they always are.



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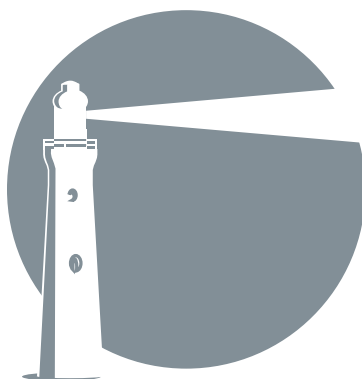
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