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## EXILED TYCOON BEREZOVSKY THREATENS PUTIN WITH COUP BEFORE 2008

by Marina Lapenkova

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Russian billionaire Boris Berezovsky has never made any secret of his loathing for President Vladimir Putin, but in an interview in his London exile the controversial tycoon went one step further with a vow to mount a coup.

"President Putin violates the constitution and any violent action on the opposition's part is justified today, and that includes taking power by force, which is exactly what I am working at," the oligarch, looking vibrant despite five years in self-imposed exile, told AFP at his Piccadilly office.

For the past 18 months, "we have been preparing to take power by force in Russia," he said, claiming he would finance this with a fortune that had "tripled" over the last five years to billions of dollars.

The disgraced eminence grise of Russia's former president Boris Yeltsin and one-time media baron fled Russia in 2000 after Putin's rise to power, saying that charges of large-scale fraud and swindling against him were politically motivated. He successfully fought off extradition attempts and in 2003 was granted political asylum in Britain.

Berezovsky, who still owns the opposition Moscow business daily Kommersant, said that Putin was guilty of wrecking the country's post-Soviet constitution.

"The Kremlin has demolished Russian federalism, particularly through the law on appointing governors" for the regions, a law the parliament adopted in late 2004, he said.

This reform abolished election of regional chiefs by popular vote and sparked biting criticism in Russia and concerns abroad that Russia's leadership has taken an authoritarian course.

Berezovsky added that "that Russia under Putin has practically lost the North Caucasus where separatism has grown stronger and also lost its influence in Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova and is yielding its positions in Armenia."

"Everything that will be done to reestablish the Russian constitution will be constitutional by definition and that will happen before 2008," the year of the next presidential elections, he claimed.

However, a coup, he said, could only be mounted by "one elite against another in power."

"I do not rely on one elite only, military, media, business or secret services -- rather on each and all, not excluding even an alliance with former enemies," he added.

"The majority and the mob never interested me. They are always

conservative. All changes will be made by an active minority, like it happened in Ukraine," Berezovsky continued.

For people to take to the streets, the elite would first have to "influence a part of society," he said, refusing to give any further detail on his plan, other than to say that it would not mirror the 2004 Ukrainian "orange revolution".

"My political aim is to transform Russia into a modern democratic state, to prevent its disappearance as a state. I do not hide that, but I do not want to reveal my tactics," he said.

Berezovsky's Civil Liberties Foundation recently acknowledged having donated 21 million dollars to sources close to Viktor Yushchenko, the opposition candidate who led the "orange revolution" and then was elected Ukraine's president over a pro-Russian rival.

<http://www.groong.usc.edu/news/msg135478.html>

