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Countess Alexandra Tolstoy demands answers from NatWest after claiming it wrongly closed her account because of her Russian ex-husband - as bank's board faces mounting anger over handling of Nigel Farage 'de-banking' row

- **Adventurer, broadcaster and writer informed of the decision two months ago**

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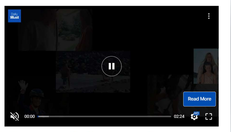
Countess Alexandra Tolstoy has demanded answers from NatWest after it closed her account without any explanation - as the bank's board continues to face a backlash over its decision to 'de-bank' **Nigel Farage**.

The adventurer, broadcaster and writer was informed her account was being terminated in a letter two months ago.

She says she was not given a reason, but believes subsequent developments suggest it was due to her former partner Sergei Pugachev - a Russian oligarch known as **Putin's** banker.



The 49-year-old - a descendent of the Tolstoy dynasty - insists she has not spoken to the father of her three children for seven years and does not receive any maintenance from him.

She says further research revealed she was declared a PEP (a politically exposed person) and had her name flagged on the database of World-Check, which helps businesses identify a variety of specific third-party risks by screening people for money-laundering, sanctions and terrorist financing.

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Countess Alexandra Tolstoy was informed her account was being terminated in a letter two months ago

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The aristocrat says she was not given a reason, but subsequent developments suggest it was due to her former partner Sergei Pugachev - a Russian oligarch known as Putin's banker

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She wrote to NatWest and argued the PEP classification was incorrect. She says the bank agreed to change it but refused to reinstate her account or provide any more information about why it was still closed.

'I said "Come on, I'm a single parent. This is a really human, horrible case. I've got three children — I can't support them, what do I do?" and they just wrote this absolutely extraordinarily arrogant phrase "We see no reason to meet you or speak to you or give you the rationale behind our reasoning"', she told the BBC.

Alexandra spoke amid the ongoing row about Coutts' decision to terminate its relationship with Nigel Farage.

Alison Rose, the CEO of NatWest - which owns the prestigious bank - had previously briefed a BBC reporter that Mr Farage was ditched for failing to meet minimum wealth thresholds.

However, it subsequently emerged that the bank had compiled a dossier on the former UKIP leader which branded him 'xenophobic and racist'

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The revelation sparked a huge political row, with Rishi Sunak and Chancellor Jeremy Hunt both speaking out about the danger of banks refusing to provide services to people because of their political views.

Alexandra said her own 'de-banking' had caused chaos for her business providing horsending holidays, although she has eventually been able to find an online bank to pay her bills.

© REUTERS
Sergei Pugachev was previously close to Vladimir Putin but fell out of favour and was labelled a 'traitor' by the Russian president

'It has been unbelievably stressful to the point of I don't sleep — I'm terrified, I've got three children, their father doesn't support them. How do I work my business? How do I rent my home?'

Alexandra found the bank had 'on false premises' used a series of articles about her to come to the decision.

This included an interview she gave to the Daily Mail 12 years ago.

The 2011 article focused on her love affair with Russian oligarch Sergei Pugachev and their plans to attend the wedding of Prince Albert of Monaco. It spoke about Botox and Bentleys, and the Valentino haute couture frock that Alexandra would be wearing.

It was considered strong enough evidence to be included in the World-Check file which Alexandra says is now having such a big impact on her financial affairs.

'How can they use newspaper headlines swept off the internet?' she **previously told the Mail**.

Alexandra split acrimoniously from Pugachev when he fled the **UK in 2015** despite a court order banning him from leaving the country.

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According to Alexandra, who was born in the UK and is a British citizen, they are not in contact and he has not supported her and their children since he left.

She says she has no financial links to Russia - something which would be checked by NatWest.

© PA
Alexandra spoke amid the ongoing row about Coutts' decision to terminate its relationship with Nigel Farage

NatWest has said it will post a cheque within 60 days for the £12,000 she had in her savings account.

She has now gone to the financial ombudsman and sent a data access request for the information the bank holds on her.

'Everybody has the right to a bank account. It is an essential human right, in the digital economy we live in', she said.

'I think this has to go further — this is just the beginning, I don't think this is the end.'

Russia | Nigel Farage | Vladimir Putin