

Alexandra Tolstoy

DEBANKED FOR BEING RUSSIAN

AUGUST 2, 2023



Description

For weeks, the news cycle has been dominated by the “debanking” of [Nigel Farage](#) and its fallout. After the former Ukip and Brexit Party leader [revealed](#) that his bank accounts had been closed against his wishes, NatWest CEO Alison Rose [stepped down](#) from her position and other figures from across the political spectrum [claimed](#) that they, too, had received the debanking treatment.

Among them is the businesswoman Countess Alexandra Tolstoy, who [spoke out](#) earlier this month following the closure of her NatWest account, supposedly because of her status as a [PEP](#) (politically exposed person).

Tolstoy, a relative of the great novelist Leo, has questioned whether her Russian roots affected the bank’s decision. Another consideration is her [relationship](#) with Sergei Pugachev, an oligarch once close to Putin who is now in exile.

Speaking to *UnHerd’s* Freddie Sayers, Tolstoy explained that by carrying out an SAR (subject access request), she discovered her status as a PEP was based on *Daily Mail* articles stating she lived in Monaco and was married to Pugachev. Really, neither fact is true. “I do not live in Monaco,” she said. “And I am not married and never was married to a Russian oligarch.”

On further communication with NatWest, the bank claimed to have never classified Tolstoy as a PEP, and she remains “in this ridiculous situation” in which she still doesn’t know the reason for her account’s closure.

Many Russian expats living in the UK are apparently in a similar position. “It is really tough for a lot of Russians,” she said, “because they’re really against the war.” As an example she referred to Evgeny Chichvarkin, a London-based Russian restaurateur who, even as an “extremely vocal opponent of Putin”, has had his accounts [shut down](#).

During the *UnHerd* interview, Tolstoy expanded on her family’s history. “My grandfather fled the Bolshevik Revolution because he was going to be killed,” she noted, making clear that “he hated” Russia, as “it was the country that killed most of his relatives.” Nevertheless, through her father’s interest in his heritage she was exposed to Russian history and literature, and “completely fell in love” with the country when she first visited in 1992.

Besides the *War and Peace* author, there are several prominent members of the Tolstoy clan. Alexandra described Vladimir Tolstoy, Putin’s chief cultural advisor, as “very nice”, while Fyokla Tolstaya, a Russian TV presenter, as “incredibly brave” for speaking out against the Ukraine war. Meanwhile, Pyotr Tolstoy, the Deputy Chairman of the State Duma, is “crazy”, according to Alexandra, who said, “I’m really against him. He’s a complete phoney.”

When speaking about Russia’s oligarchs — including her former partner Pugachev, as well as Putin — Tolstoy explained that it was “like *Narcos*”. Unlike the “creative and exciting” Moscow intelligentsia she knew before meeting Pugachev, she described the oligarchs not “obeying any kind of law” and acting as though they were in “kindergarten” when it came to decision-making. The countess stated that Pugachev is a “very controlling and frightening person”, who “tried to abduct [their three] children” and held her “hostage”.

Although he has been in legal trouble with both the Russian and UK governments, according to Tolstoy, his bank accounts are “completely functioning”, and he lives “an extremely rich and opulent life in the south of France”.

Regarding the war, Tolstoy stressed she has been “very publicly open that [she’s] obviously deeply against what Russia is doing”. She believes that the UK is “absolutely right to support Ukraine”, and does not plan on returning to Russia before the war’s end. Yet she refuses to “downplay” her Russian heritage: “I feel really proud and I speak Russian most days; I read Russian every day.”

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