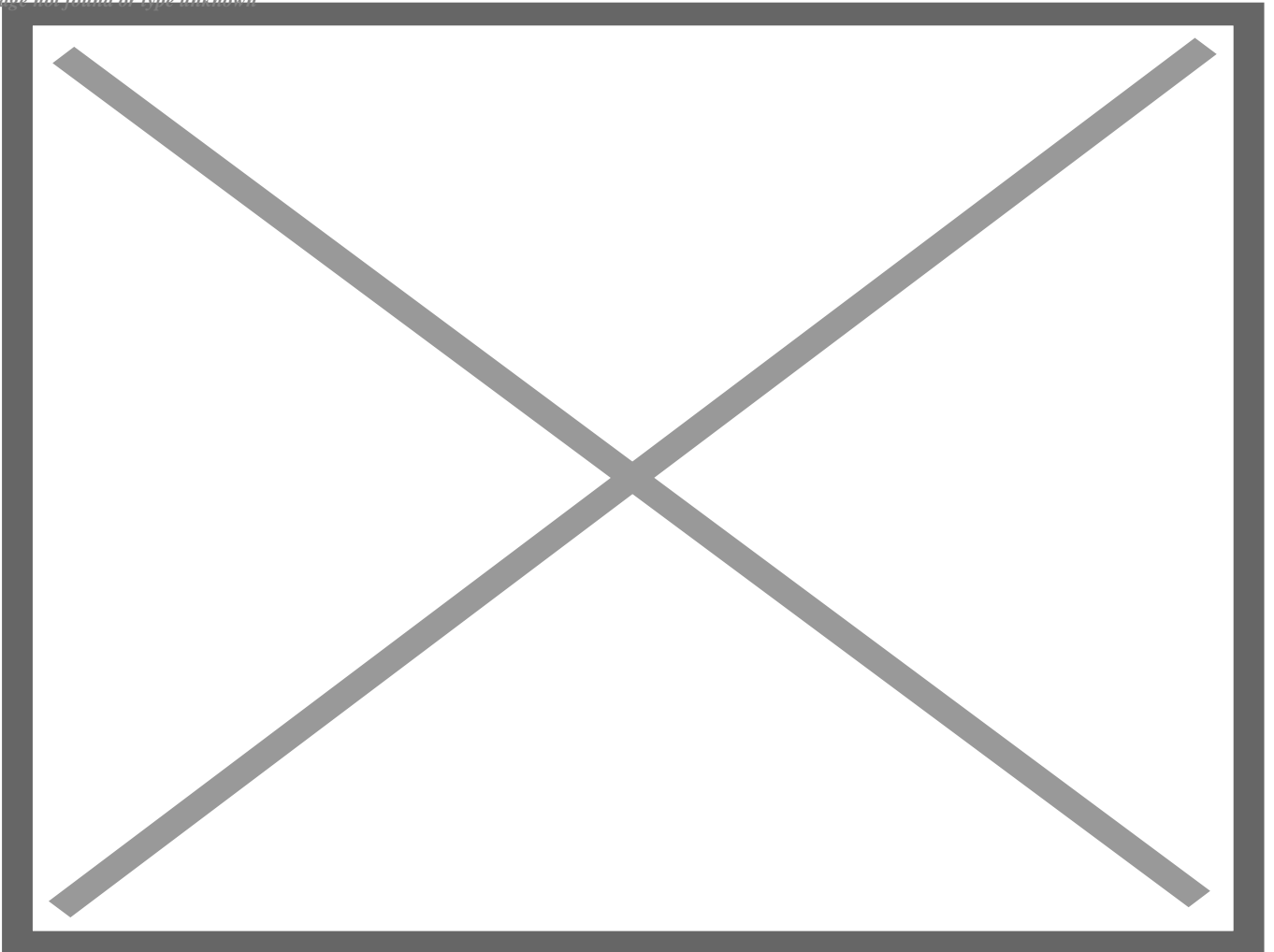


Last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, dies in Moscow

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Mikhail Gorbachev.

Moscow, August 30 (RHC)— The last leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, died Tuesday at 91. "Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev died tonight after a long and serious illness," the Central Clinical Hospital of Russia reported.

In a statement, the health center said that Gorbachev died after a long illness. No other details were given.

Gorbachev set out to revitalize the Soviet Union but ended up unleashing forces that led to the breakup of the state, the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe, and the end of the Cold War.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in a statement that Russian President Vladimir Putin offered deep condolences over Gorbachev's death and would send an official telegram to Gorbachev's family in the morning.

Gorbachev, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990, is regarded as one of the most prominent political figures of the 20th century.

Gorbachev ruled the Soviet Union for seven years until its dissolution in 1991.

He headed the USSR as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1985 through 1991, the sixth in the history of the state, and as President of the USSR from 1990 to 1991, he was the first and last in the country's history.

His performance earned him legions of supporters and detractors. The former consider him a legendary reformer who brought freedom and democracy to a hermetic country. For the latter, he is simply responsible for the end of a superpower.

Many of the changes, including the Soviet breakup, bore no resemblance to the transformation he envisioned when he became Soviet leader in March 1985.

Gorbachov will be buried in Moscow's Novodévichi Cemetery in a grave next to the remains of his wife Raísa, reported TASS, citing a source close to the deceased's relatives.

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