

Baturina Foe Gets Asylum in Lithuania

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A former city prefect wanted on suspicion of swindling the billionaire wife of the former Moscow mayor said he was granted political asylum in Lithuania.

Yury Khardikov — accused of swindling Yelena Baturina of 1 billion rubles (\$35 million) in a shady land deal — said prosecution against him in Russia prompted Lithuanian authorities to grant the asylum, Rosbalt news agency [reported](#) late Thursday.

But Vilnius prosecutors continue a preliminary probe into Khardikov on suspicion of laundering \$39 million that he allegedly transferred to Lithuania from Germany, Lithuanian web site Litovsky Kuryer said Friday, without elaborating on the origin of the money.

Russian investigators say Khardikov, a former top manager at Unified Energy Systems who became a Moscow prefect in 2007, has led Baturina's company, Inteko, to purchase a land plot of unclear ownership in Sochi in 2005.

But his problems only began in 2009, when then-Mayor Yury Luzhkov fired him from the job of the Northern Administrative District's prefect, citing his bad performance on repairing apartment blocks.

Khardikov, who was vacationing abroad at the time, opted not to return to Russia, where a case was opened against him later the same year.

Khardikov was placed on the international wanted list on large-scale fraud charges, punishable with up to 10 years behind bars, in late 2009.

He has arrived in Lithuania in 2010 and spent a month under arrest there on suspicion of money laundering, but was later released from detention, Litovsky Kuryer reported.

Khardikov said at a press conference late January that he expects the Russian case against him to be closed following Luzhkov's dismissal in September, Rosbalt said.

But he also complained that Lithuanian authorities were "stifling" his business by freezing his bank accounts and confiscating his passport over the money laundering case.

Luzhkov requested a residency permit in another Baltic state, Latvia, after his being fired, but authorities of the country he often lambasted on political grounds in the past refused his request in January.

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