

Smolensk City Manager Detained in Bribery Case

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Smolensk city manager Lazarev

Smolensk's city manager was led away in handcuffs by masked officers toting automatic weapons Tuesday after his deputy was caught red-handed accepting a bribe on his behalf, police said.

Konstantin Lazarev, a native Muscovite who was appointed city manager by the municipal legislature last year, was questioned at the police station while his office was searched by an investigator Tuesday, judicial news agency Rapsi reported, citing a city police spokesman.

"After the investigator finished his work in his office, the official was led from the city police building in handcuffs and driven away to an undisclosed location," the spokesman said.

Video footage posted on local news site SmolCity.ru [showed](#) Lazarev walking to the building's exit, escorted by masked men with automatic rifles.

Smolensk Mayor Alexander Danilyuk said late Tuesday that Lazarev and his deputy Nikolai Petrochenko were shipped to Moscow, where they would be charged with graft, RIA-Novosti [reported](#). He did not elaborate.

His detention appears to be the latest in a pre-election crackdown on corruption that saw Tula Governor Vyacheslav Dudka resign and then charged with bribery earlier this month.

The investigation in Smolensk, located some 400 kilometers west of Moscow, began Monday when police searched the city administration building and detained Nikolai Petrochenko, Interfax reported.

Petrochenko had been caught accepting a bribe, and he told investigators that the money was intended for Lazarev and another deputy city manager, Alexander Pogulyayev, Interfax said, citing an unidentified city official. He did not elaborate on the size of the bribe or what it was for.

Petrochenko, who had held his job since 2002, was responsible for communal utilities, a notoriously corrupt industry in Russia. He was also overseeing preparations for the celebration of the city's 1,150th anniversary in July 2013.

Petrochenko's lawyer said he did not know the whereabouts of his client and whether he had been charged, Interfax reported.

The bribery investigation is being handled by the anti-corruption department of the Interior Ministry in Moscow, RIA-Novosti reported. City police confirmed that they were not involved in the case, according to SmolCity.ru.

The Interior Ministry did not comment on the investigation Tuesday.

Smolensk has seen corruption cases before. In April, Mayor Eduard Kachanovsky was jailed for four years on charges of extorting an apartment from a real estate developer in exchange for construction permits.

Both the city manager, who is responsible for the city's economic life, and the mayor are appointed by the local legislature. Lazarev, 45, a former border guard, became city manager after two years at lower positions within the city administration.

In Tula, Dudka was accused in February of extorting a bribe of 40 million rubles (\$1.5 million) from a supermarket chain. He stepped down last summer and was subsequently charged with bribery, punishable by up to 12 years in prison. An investigation is ongoing.

Interestingly, a group of Smolensk officials — though not this week's suspects — reportedly deserted the ruling United Russia party in recent weeks for rival Just Russia.

Earlier this month, Just Russia founder Sergei Mironov told reporters that his party was seeing an influx of disenchanted former United Russia members, including a group of Smolensk city legislators, Interfax reported. He mentioned no names.

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