

Top Election Official 'Barred From U.S.'

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The country's top elections official said he has been "honored" to be included in the "Magnitsky list" of Russian officials blacklisted for U.S. entry over human rights violations.

Vladimir Churov, chairman of the Central Elections Commission, said as a result he would not be able to travel to the United States to work as an observer at the U.S. presidential election in November 2012.

"Of course, I don't have anything to do with [Sergei] Magnitsky," Churov [said](#) in an interview with Dozhd television aired Tuesday night. "I've never seen him, I don't know him, I had not heard [about him] before the story about his death."

Hermitage Capital lawyer Magnitsky was detained in 2008 by law enforcement officials whom he accused of defrauding the government of millions of dollars. He died in pretrial detention 11 months later of health problems and, according to an independent, Kremlin-ordered investigation, a severe beating administered by prison guards just hours before his death. No one has been charged in connection with his death.

U.S. Senator Benjamin Cardin introduced last year a bill proposing sanctions against 60 Russian officials implicated in Magnitsky's death. The bill has never been passed, but the State Department confirmed this summer that dozens of unspecified Russian officials had been blacklisted over the Magnitsky case.

Churov told Dozhd that he was on "[Cardin's list](#)," but gave no details. He added that he would only travel to the United States at the personal invitation of Cardin, who did not comment Wednesday.

Churov, who has bristled at requests from Western election observers to monitor State Duma elections in December, added that he thought being on the list was an honor because "it exposed the stupidity of those who make such lists."

A State Department official declined to comment on whether Churov was on a blacklist, saying, "We do not publicly disclose the names of individuals who are denied visas."

Churov, indeed, was never implicated in Magnitsky's case and was not on Cardin's list, which has been made public. He is, however, routinely accused by the political opposition of interfering with elections on behalf of the Kremlin and the ruling United Russia party. The allegations earned him a slot on a broader list of 308 Russian officials accused of violating human rights that opposition leader Garry Kasparov passed to the U.S. Congress in June. Other well-known names on that list included the Kremlin's propaganda mastermind Vladislav Surkov and Nashi founder Vasily Yakemenko, currently of the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs.

Editor's note: This story has been updated from a version that appeared in the Oct. 20, print edition to include a comment from the U.S. State Department and the fact that Garry Kasparov lobbied U.S. Congress to put Vladimir Churov on a blacklist. Also, the newspaper version incorrectly stated that Churov did not explain why he was "honored" to be on the blacklist.

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