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U.K. Exiles Blamed in Journalist's 2006 Death

By Ken Martinez

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Former Chechen militant emissary Akhmed Zakayev and businessman Boris Berezovsky — both living in exile in London — have been accused of being the masterminds behind the 2006 murder of Novaya Gazeta reporter Anna Politkovskaya, Kommersant reported Wednesday.

The accusation comes from the former head of the operations and search division of the Moscow police, Dmitry Pavlyuchenkov, who gave the information to the Investigative Committee while being questioned about his role in the journalist's death, an anonymous source told Kommersant.

Pavlyuchenkov said the motive stemmed from a conflict that arose between the London exiles and Politkovskaya when she visited the British capital. The Kommersant report did not identify the topic of the dispute.

The Investigative Committee has not officially denied or confirmed the information.

Pavlyuchenkov's lawyer Karen Nersisyan said his client "did not say he was certain he knew the names of those that ordered the killings" but that he "knows about them from other people."

One name belonged to Chechen native Lom-Ali Gaitukayev, who Pavlyuchenkov said organized the killing.

Pavlyuchenkov told the committee that Gaitukayev received $150,000 to carry out the killing and gave some of this money to Pavlyuchenkov and another former police official, Sergei Khadzhikurbanov.

Pavlyuchenkov said he obtained Politkovskaya's address and ordered his subordinates to track her movements. He also provided the gun used in the murders to suspected triggerman Rustam Makhmudov and his accomplices.

Novaya Gazeta head editor Dmitry Muratov told Interfax that he thinks the whole story is "absolutely ridiculous." He pointed out that several years ago Pavlyuchenkov was the principal witness in the case, and now he is the accused.

Muratov also expressed skepticism about the timing of the story, saying, "There were no leaks in the story for the whole year, and now suddenly in the last week of the presidential election the information has come out."

Dmitry Dovgy, a former senior Investigative Committee official, in an April 2008 interview with Izvestia, accused Berezovsky of ordering the murder through Chechen crime boss Khozh-Akhmed Nukhayev.

Dovgy told the newspaper, "At that time it was beneficial to [Berezovsky]," though he provided no evidence for the claim.

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