The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Investigators Open New Inquiry Into Opposition-Minded Lawmaker

By Alexander Bratersky

August 01, 2012



Opposition politician Gennady Gudkov addressing the crowd at a December rally on Bolotnaya Ploshchad.

The Investigative Committee found itself in an awkward situation Wednesday when the man whose testimony it used to open an investigation into an opposition-minded State Duma deputy was himself jailed for embezzlement.

Investigators announced Wednesday that they were checking whether A Just Russia Deputy Gennady Gudkov owned business assets abroad, which could be illegal in his position as a lawmaker.

The check was opened after investigators received a complaint from Bulgarian businessman Ivailo Zartov, the former director of a company established by the deputy's wife, Maria Gudkova, and called Business Security Consulting Ltd.

But hours after the announcement, a Bulgarian court sentenced Zartov to nine years in prison for embezzling funds from Business Security Consulting Ltd., the Bulgarian site Burgas News reported. The district court in Burgas also ordered Zartov to pay 500,000 Bulgarian levs ($314,000) in damages to Business Security Consulting Ltd.

The Investigative Committee did not have an immediate comment on the court ruling, which came late Wednesday.

In a statement on its website, it claimed to have evidence that Gudkov owns stakes in several foreign companies despite being a deputy, and accused him of developing business in Bulgaria through a Bulgarian-registered company called English Village and the Gibraltar-based Business Security Consulting Ltd.

Gudkov, a former KGB official who has actively supported anti-Kremlin protests since December, has faced an escalating legal attack in recent months, culminating last month with his announcement that he had been forced to sell Oskord, a leading private security agency that he founded in 1992, for a song because of his support for the opposition.

Gudkov handed ownership of Oskord to his wife after being elected as a lawmaker in 2001.

Gudkov, who was photographed at Zartov's trial in February, has said he briefly knew Zartov and had introduced him to several Russian businessmen. He also has called Zartov a "crook."

Burgas News said that Gudkova testified against Zartov during the trial as the current head of Business Security Consulting Ltd., which founded the English Village resort development. English Village was a joint venture between Zartov and a group of Russian investors.

Gudkov told The Moscow Times that his wife represented Russian investors, whom he declined to name, but that she did not own a stake in the company. The Investigative Committee on Wednesday also accused Gudkov of being actively involved in the business of Kolomensky Stroitel, a construction materials trader, and of "making staff decisions" during company board meetings.

Gudkov also co-owns a company called Roshan, investigators said.

According to the Spark-Interfax business database, Gudkov and his wife are co-owners of Kolomensky Stroitel, based in Kolomna in the Moscow region, and he owns a stake in Roshan.

While a lawmaker can own a business, he cannot profit from its activities or be involved in its operational decisions, analysts said, adding that it would be difficult for investigators to prove that Gudkov had been involved in the businesses.

Gudkov told The Moscow Times late Wednesday that he considered Zartov's sentence too lenient.

He also called allegations against him "idiotic" in comments published on Izvestia's website. "I do have a stake in the construction market, but it is managed by other people," he said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/08/01/investigators-open-new-inquiry-into-opposition-minded-

lawmaker-a16716