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# Investigator Removed From Hermitage Tax Case

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Hermitage Capital CEO Bill Browder says the case against him is punishment for accusations Magnitsky made against a group of tax and police officials.

Police have sacked the lead investigator in a high-profile tax-evasion case against Hermitage Capital CEO Bill Browder and the company's late lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky.

Investigator Mikhail Shupolovsky will take over from Boris Kibis, who has been reassigned in a "redelegation of tasks," city police said, Interfax reported Wednesday.

Browder and Magnitsky are accused of lowballing Hermitage Capital's 2001 tax bill by about 500 million rubles ($15 million).

Browder and supporters say both the case and Magnitsky's 2009 death in pretrial detention are punishment for accusations Magnitsky made against a group of tax and police officials whom he said embezzled a $230 million tax refund.

The case has attracted international condemnation, and U.S. lawmakers have attached Magnitsky's name to a bill that would impose sanctions on human rights abusers worldwide.

"It will be interesting to see how this new investigator will compromise himself and the Russian state," a Hermitage Capital representative said in e-mailed comments.

"This will be the fourth investigator in one of the most malicious prosecutions in Russian history," the representative said, adding that previous investigators had "organized Magnitsky's torture" and "conducted the first-ever posthumous case in Russian history."

A report by the Kremlin's human rights council published in July 2011 found that Magnitsky had been "completely deprived of medical help" before his death, with evidence suggesting he had died as a result of a beating.

Investigators are often replaced in politically tinged cases, said Yevgeny Arkhipov, chairman of the Russian Association of Lawyers.

"Political cases make officials very nervous. They, in turn, pressure investigators for results and replace them in a heartbeat," he said by telephone on Wednesday.

The tax evasion case was opened against Browder immediately after his fund accused Russian police officers of working with criminals to steal his companies.

Magnitsky was added to the case eight months later and jailed immediately after he revealed that the theft of the companies was part of a serial tax fraud totaling more than $337 million carried out by the same people. He died after about a year in custody.

On Wednesday, Magnitsky's former boss, Jamison Firestone, published an open letter to President Vladimir Putin, who now doubles as chairman of the presidential anti-corruption council, to investigate officials implicated by Magnitsky.

Earlier this week, Rosbalt reported that investigator Pavel Karpov, whom Magnitsky accused of helping steal 5.4 billion rubles ($169 million) from the budget, had resigned from the police force.

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