

Orthodox Businessman Thinks Pussy Riot May Be Behind His Problems

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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Boiko-Veliky, an ardent Orthodox believer, said he thinks Pussy Riot supporters have tried to hurt his business. **Vladimir Filonov**

A devout Orthodox businessman who once threatened to fire employees who had sex outside of marriage found himself in the spotlight again Wednesday after a news report claimed he had been [detained](#) on suspicion of illegally seizing land plots in the Moscow region.

The Interfax news report was quickly denied as false by both the Investigative Committee and the businessman, Vasily Boiko-Veliky, who angrily speculated that his reputation was being tarnished in revenge for his outspoken opposition of the Pussy Riot punk group.

A spokesman for Boiko-Veliky, who heads the Your Own Financial Caretaker investment company and the Russkoye Moloko agricultural holding, also said the news report might be linked to a fight for land between him and a regional district head facing dismissal by Moscow region Governor Sergei Shoigu.

Interfax said Boiko-Veliky was [among 12 people arrested](#) by Moscow region police on suspicion of illegally expropriating land plots worth more than \$9.3 million from local farmers between 2003 and 2011.

The news agency, citing a law enforcement source, said Boiko-Veliky was the suspected mastermind of the scheme.

In a statement posted Wednesday on its website, the Interior Ministry's economic crimes directorate detailed the criminal case and identified the suspected mastermind as a 53-year-old Moscow resident. Boiko-Veliky turns 53 next week.

But Boiko-Veliky's spokesman Alexander Saranin told The Moscow Times that his boss had not been detained and was on vacation outside Moscow.

“The only people who profit from such disinformation are those who want to carry out an illegal seizure of land plots in Ruza,” Saranin said by telephone.

He speculated that since Shoigu announced plans to fire some district heads, “officials ... want to sell something that doesn't belong to them at the last minute to provide themselves a living.”

Boiko-Veliky, an ardent Orthodox believer who made headlines in 2010 after promising to fire employees who were in sexual relationships without being married, accused opposition activists of being behind the report of his arrest.

In a statement posted on his investment company's website, he accused Pussy Riot supporters and “carriers of white ribbons and orangists” of encouraging investigators to illegally prosecute him and of providing deliberately false information in order to inflict financial damage to Russkoye Moloko and to harm a new patriotic party he is founding.

The statement is apparently referring to anti-Kremlin activists, who have adopted white ribbons as their symbol and are denounced by critics as trying to incite a popular uprising resembling Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution.

In February, in an interview to website Piter.tv, Boiko-Veliky announced a reward of 500,000 rubles (\$15,700) for the names of each of the organizers of Pussy Riot's performance that month at Christ the Savior Cathedral, and a reward of 50,000 rubles for the names of each of the performers.

Pussy Riot supporters reacted by issuing calls on the website of Snob magazine to boycott Russkoye Moloko dairy products, Boiko-Veliky said Wednesday.

Last week, three Pussy Riot members were sentenced to two years in prison for participating in the performance, in a case that drew harsh criticism from Western governments and human rights groups.

A criminal case into the swindling of farmers in the Ruza district out of almost 3,600 hectares of land was opened in 2006, [the Moscow region branch of the Investigative Committee](#) said in a statement.

Boiko-Veliky, who owns about 37,000 hectares of land in the district, spent 20 months in custody in 2007 and 2008 as a suspect in the case. Regional investigators said Boiko-Veliky has remained free since being released in October 2008 on bail of 50 million rubles (worth \$1.7 million at the time).

The statement denied that Boiko-Veliky had been detained Wednesday and said the Interior Ministry's report provided incorrect information regarding the arrest of suspects and the police's role in uncovering the crime.

Repeated calls Wednesday to the regional investigators' spokeswoman went unanswered.

Boiko-Veliky was charged with fraud and registration of illegally acquired property in the 2006 case, and in July he was additionally charged with organizing a criminal group. He faces up to ten years in prison for fraud, seven years for registration of illegally acquired property, and 20 years for organizing a criminal group.

Boiko-Veliky said in his statement that Oleg Yakunin, head of the Ruza district administration, had been repeatedly accused of stealing land owned by Russkoye Moloko.

“[That] is why many media reports name him as a possible mastermind of the criminal prosecution of the agricultural holding's leadership, who speak out against the corruption of officials working in the district administration,” he said.

Boiko-Veliky was apparently referring to criminal cases against Yakunin and his deputies on bribery and extortion charges in connection with illegal sales of district land plots.

These cases were cited in an open letter to Shoigu published in July by Ruza district lawmakers demanding Yakunin's dismissal. In 2011, Yakunin's deputy and brother-in-law Igor Miroshkin and two other senior district officials, Oleg Novozhilov and Vyacheslav Suslov, were sentenced to lengthy prison terms on fraud and bribery charges.

Tatyana Solovyova, Yakunin's spokeswoman, denied any involvement of her boss in the criminal prosecution of Boiko-Veliky.

“Boiko-Veliky's claims against the district administration and Yakunin personally are understandable — the administration has been refusing to approve the borders of land plots that make up part of enterprises belonging to Russkoye Moloko,” Solovyova said by telephone.

“This has prevented Boiko-Veliky from managing these land plots,” she said.

If the administration approved the borders as the businessman interpreted them and if he disposed of the land plots in any way, such as by selling them, before a court ruling in the criminal case against him, “the citizens who suffered [from Boiko] would not be able to reinstate their [land] rights, even if the court ruled against Boiko,” Solovyova said.

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