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Former Duma Deputy Suspected of Ordering Murder Out of Jealousy

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A former State Duma deputy has been put on a federal wanted list on suspicion of attempting to murder a former aide who married a woman the ex-lawmaker was in love with.

Valery Panov, who represented the ruling United Russia party from 2003 to 2011, allegedly hired an ex-con to murder Fyodor Sakharov, a former aide who also served as deputy mayor of the Chelyabinsk region town of Troitsk, Kommersant reported Friday, citing a source close to the investigation.

Panov, who is also a board member of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, allegedly organized the killing to punish Sakharov for having married Panov's close friend Yekaterina Pankratova, whom Panov supposedly had designs on, the report said.

In July, Moscow police learned from informants that two Dagestanis, Magomedvalid Eminov and Usman Kamberov, were looking for someone to carry out the killing of Sakharov

for 400,000 rubles ($12,400). They had been hired by former prisoner and Moscow resident Alexander Knyazev, who later told police that he was acting on Panov's order, Kommersant reported.

Undercover police officers pretending to be professional killers were hired by Eminov and Kamberov, warned Sakharov of the imminent attempt on his life, and hid him at a country house in the Chelyabinsk region.

Regional police reported that Sakharov went missing, while Moscow police, assisted by actors, made fake photos of Sakharov lying in a pit in a forest with two wounds to his head.

The undercover officers presented the photos to Eminov and Kamberov in early August as evidence that they had carried out the killing. Then, after receiving payment from the pair, the officers detained them. Knyazev was also detained as a middleman.

Police suspect that Panov has gone into hiding abroad. A spokesman for the Chelyabinsk region employers' union Promass, of which Panov is president, told Kommersant that Panov has been on a planned vacation since July 27.

Panov told Kommersant through his spokesperson that he was "surprised and perplexed" at the charges against him. He told Komsomolskaya Pravda that the charges might be an attempt to discredit him and ruin his career.

KP identified Panov's friend Pankratova as a businesswoman from Chelyabinsk who had supposedly bought business assets in Troitsk. Sakharov served as a deputy mayor of Troitsk until late June, when he resigned and moved to the city of Chelyabinsk, the Chelyabinsk.ru news site reported last month.

Before being elected to the lower house of parliament, Panov worked as general director of Chelyabinsk-based truck manufacturer Ural, part of GAZ Group.

Repeated calls to Moscow police, Chelyabinsk regional police, the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, Promass and the Chelyabinsk regional branch of United Russia went unanswered Friday.

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