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Key Witness in Magnitsky Case Found Dead in Britain

By The Moscow Times

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A key witness in a Swiss investigation into alleged money-laundering by Russian officials suspected in the death of anti-corruption lawyer Sergei Magnitsky was found dead outside his palatial home in southern England, a media report said Wednesday.

The body of 44-year-old Russian businessman Alexander Perepilichny was discovered two weeks ago, but news of his death came to light only now, The Independent reported. Russian media later reported his last name as Perepelichny.

An initial post-mortem conducted by local police was "inconclusive" and could not immediately establish the cause of Perepilichny's death, the British daily reported, adding that the exiled businessman is the fourth person linked to the Magnitsky case who died suddenly.

Unconfirmed reports said that Perepilichny, who applied for political asylum in Britain three

years ago, had gone jogging prior to collapsing not far from his mansion on the outskirts of Weybridge. Local police said additional tests would be carried out to determine the cause of death.

The Independent reported that Perepilichny was instrumental in the opening of a case against the so-called Kluyev Group, a set of government officials accused by Hermitage Capital lawyer Magnitsky of stealing $230 million in Russian government funds.

Magnitsky died on the floor of a Moscow pretrial detention center in November 2009 while awaiting trial on tax evasion charges, which his supporters say were fabricated. A report by the Kremlin's human rights council said he had been severely beaten the day he died.

Perepilichny provided Swiss prosecutors with information detailing how Russian officials used Swiss bank accounts to purchase luxury estates abroad using money from fraudulent tax returns, an unidentified person with knowledge of the investigation told the Independent.

A Hermitage Capital representative told Gazeta.ru on Wednesday that Perepilichny had approached the company in 2010 with evidence that certain officials accused by Magnitsky of stealing money from the Russian treasury had become wealthy. That evidence was passed on to Swiss prosecutors, the representative said.

An unidentified Interior Ministry official told Interfax on Wednesday that Perepilichny had nothing to do with the Magnitsky tax case.

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