

Key Figure in 'Gambling Affair' Jailed Until July

By [Ivan Nechepurenko](#)

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Former Moscow region deputy prosecutor Alexander Ignatenko, who is suspected of helping lead a racketeering ring that offered illegal casinos protection from prosecution for millions of dollars in cash and gifts, was ordered held in detention until July 1 by a Moscow court Friday.

Ignatenko is the only remaining prosecutor to be jailed as a suspect in the so-called "gambling affair," part of an ongoing turf war between the powerful Investigative Committee and the Prosecutor General's Office.

On Thursday, Poland extradited Ignatenko to Russia. Poland had been holding him since Jan. 2, 2012, while waiting to receive evidence from Russian authorities of his guilt in the case.

He was questioned by Russian investigators Friday and charged with bribery. Later that day, the Moscow City Court approved a request by investigators to hold him until July 1.

The former prosecutor denied the charges and refused to provide testimony in the case.

Ignatenko is suspected of playing a key role in a scheme to provide protection for underground casinos in the Moscow region in exchange for cash and opulent gifts, including bookings on private jets. He is accused of personally accepting \$1.6 million in bribes.

Polish authorities agreed to extradite him only after Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika and Investigative Committee head Alexander Bastrykin provided personal guarantees that his case would be conducted in strict accordance with Russian law.

Ignatenko said in court Friday that he had fled to Poland for health reasons but was planning to return to Russia to prove his innocence, although he filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights last year seeking to prevent his extradition.

The "gambling affair" began in February 2011 with investigators' announcement that businessman Ivan Nazarov owned a chain of illegal casinos that received protection from Moscow region prosecutors.

The case has widely been viewed as part of a power struggle between the Prosecutor General's Office and the Investigative Committee, which used to be part of the same entity but were separated in 2011.

While the committee has the authority to arrest a suspect, prosecutors can cancel the arrest and stop a case from going to trial.

More than a dozen defendants have faced charges in the case, and such prominent figures as Chaika's son Artyom were purportedly involved. Investigators said he acted as a middleman between prosecutors and the owners of the casinos.

Nazarov, who testified against Ignatenko, was released from jail along with the other suspects in the case despite admitting guilt.

In court Friday, a prosecutor objected to investigators' request to keep Ignatenko in detention, arguing that he could not continue his criminal activity and that investigators had violated the terms of the extradition agreement with Poland by seeking to charge Ignatenko with fraud as well as bribery. Poland had stipulated that the fraud charge be dropped.

The prosecutor also noted that other suspects in the case were being held under house arrest.

In response to the prosecutor's complaint, investigators said the fraud case would be halted, RIA-Novosti reported.

Ignatenko's lawyer, Alexander Asnis, called the decision to detain his client illegal and promised to appeal it.

Contact the author at i.nechepurenko@gmail.com

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