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Roizman Faces Inquiry Into Alleged Gang Links

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Yevgeny Roizman, of the Civic Platform Party, is a Mayoral Candidate for the City of Yekaterinburg

Prosecutors in the Sverdlovsk region said Wednesday that they planned to investigate Yekaterinburg mayoral candidate Yevgeny Roizman, a prominent ally of billionaire politician Mikhail Prokhorov, on suspicion of links to criminal gangs.

Information aired on the "Moment Istiny" ("The Moment of Truth") television series on Channel Five Tuesday prompted the checks, the regional prosecutor's office said in a statement.

The program said telephone records suggested that Roizman was associated with Temuri Mirzoyev, a nephew of the late crime boss Aslan Usoyan, better known as Grandpa Hassan. The legendary mobster Usoyan was killed in January by a sniper while he was exiting a restaurant in central Moscow.

Roizman, who has been leading in the polls as the candidate from Prokhorov's Civil Platform party ahead of the Sept. 8 vote in the Urals city, expressed outrage over the allegations.

“Such statements [by the prosecutor's office] discredit one of the oldest law enforcement institutions in Russia. They're simply discrediting themselves — who will take them seriously after this?” Roizman told the BBC Russia service.

The TV program, aired by Kremlin-linked Channel Five, also featured an interview with a former rehabilitation patient at Roizman's City Without Drugs foundation, who said the organization earned money by forcing patients to work and taking their pay. It also included an interview with a regional police official who called Roizman's foundation a “private prison.”

Roizman called those allegations, which are similar to past criticisms of the rehab centers, “nonsense” and said they were an attempt to discredit him ahead of the mayoral vote. “They're afraid of me,” he told the BBC.

Civil Platform representatives told news agencies that the party would consider filing a libel lawsuit against the program's producer, journalist Andrei Karaulov, if he did not publicly apologize. The party also said the allegations were being used to force Roizman to waste time meeting with law enforcement officials instead of campaigning.

Roizman has faced various other criminal accusations in the lead-up to the mayoral vote. Earlier this month, police raided a workshop run by City Without Drugs in connection with the disappearance of more than 50 icons from a church in the village of Byngi where the foundation was doing restoration work. But police said Monday that Roizman was not a suspect in the case.

Roizman is one of 12 candidates in the race to head Russia's fourth-largest city. His main rivals are considered to be United Russia's Yakov Silin, who is a deputy of regional Governor Yevgeny Kuivashev, and State Duma Deputy Alexander Burkov of A Just Russia.

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