

Moscow Court Sanctions Arrest of Ukraine Tycoon Governor Kolomoisky

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Igor Kolomoisky, the governor of Ukraine's Dnepropetrovsk region.

Moscow's Basmanny District Court on Wednesday authorized the arrest in absentia of Igor Kolomoisky, the governor of Ukraine's Dnepropetrovsk region accused by Russian investigators of organizing the killing of civilians.

"In the near future, the Investigative Committee will give the necessary instructions to relevant law enforcement authorities to immediately determine the location of the accused and take him into custody," Vladimir Markin, spokesman for the Investigative Committee, said Wednesday in a statement on the agency's website.

The court will also soon receive a request from investigators for the arrest of Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov and another suspect in the case, Sergei Melnichuk, the commander of the Ukrainian military's Aidar battalion, the committee's statement said.

Russian investigators in June opened a criminal case against Kolomoisky and Avakov over

allegations that they organized the murder of civilians in Ukraine and used prohibited means of warfare during the government's counterterrorism operations. They also stand accused of being involved in the abduction of journalists and interference in journalistic activities.

Alexander Fomin, Kolomoisky's defense lawyer, said in comments to RIA Novosti on Wednesday that he planned to appeal the court's decision.

In making its decision, the court took into consideration that Kolomoisky was influential enough of a figure to threaten witnesses, destroy evidence or otherwise obstruct the work of prosecutors in the case, according to RIA Novosti.

"Kolomoisky has connections that would allow him to hide out in the European Union. Considering the severity of the allegations against him, the court does not deem it possible to choose lighter pre-trial restrictions," RIA Novosti reported, citing court documents.

The ruling against Kolomoisky is widely seen as a political move.

The Investigative Committee has previously sought the arrest in absentia of several foreign nationals, having opened a terrorism case against Right Sector leader Dmytro Yarosh in March and seeking an international arrest warrant for former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili in early June.

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