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Crimea Nationalizes Assets of Pro-Kiev Ukrainian Billionaire

By The Moscow Times

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Dnepropetrovsk regional governor Ihor Kolomoyskyi.

Crimean authorities on Wednesday nationalized property seized from a Ukrainian billionaire accused by Russia of murder and financing punitive raids by pro-Kiev battalions against separatist fighters in eastern Ukraine, Interfax reported.

Seventy of Crimea's 100 parliamentary deputies voted to nationalize the Crimean assets of Ihor Kolomoyskyi, who as governor of Ukraine's eastern Dnipropetrovsk region has ruthlessly suppressed the pro-Russian separatist activity that tipped the neighboring Donetsk and Luhansk regions into civil war.

Acting Crimean Prime Minister Sergei Aksyonov branded Kolomoyskyi an initiator and sponsor of Kiev's military operations in eastern Ukraine and said the nationalization of his assets was "our moral right and moral duty."

Separatist fighters in eastern Ukraine have been fighting forces loyal to Kiev since April in an increasingly bloody conflict. Kiev, along with most Western leaders, accuses Russia of supporting the separatists.

The seized property — which includes a chain of gas stations and a hotel complex on Crimea's south coast that was seized by bailiffs on Monday — will be sold at auction, Aksyonov said.

The business empire of Kolomoyskyi, who according to Forbes is worth $2.1 billion, once counted Crimea as an integral part. Kolomoyskyi's Privatbank — Ukraine's largest lender — operated 337 branches on the peninsula before Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in March, after which the bank made a rushed exit.

Aksyonov said the proceeds from the asset sale will go to help customers of Privatbank left out of pocket when the bank quit the area.

Kolomoyskyi has also faced problems on the Russian mainland. Privatbank sold its Moscow-based subsidiary in spring after the Russian regulator began large-scale checks of the bank's activities.

On Tuesday, Russia's Investigative Committee said it had seized a building in central Moscow indirectly owned by Kolomoyskyi. The committee's spokesman said the profits from renting the building could finance "criminal activity" in eastern Ukraine.

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