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Death of a Rocketman: Who Was Vladimir Evdokimov?

Former Roscosmos Quality Control Director Found Dead In Cell Toilet

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TASS

On the morning on March 20, Russian news outlets reported the death of a 52-year-old male in a pre-trial detention center in Moscow. The victim was Vladimir Evdokimov, former director at the state-owned Roscosmos space corporation. Investigators say he may have been the victim of a contract killing. He was accused of taking part in a $3 million fraud scheme.

Evdokimov was arrested in December on charges of embezzlement. He is by no means the only space industry official to have been locked up for fraud, and in fact, over the past several years, the Russian space program as a whole has been hit by scandal after scandal: Rockets

have been doomed by shoddy work and efforts to build a new launch site in the Far East have been plagued by corruption.

The difference now is that before Evdokimov, no one caught up in the industry's rampant corruption problem has died. The head of Roscosmos, Igor Komarov, praised Evdokimov as a professional who has helped elevate quality control standards in the space industry.

Initial reports suggested that authorities were investigating the case as a possible suicide. But then Russia's investigative committee opened a murder investigation on March 18. By March 20, the working theory among investigators was that Evdokimov was murdered for cooperating.

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Who Was Vladimir Evdokimov?

Prior to his arrest in December, Evdokimov was the director of quality control at Roscosmos. In his time there, Roscosmos reformed from a federal agency — the Russian equivalent of NASA — to a large state-owned corporation. The new entity was tasked not only with operating space hardware but of streamlining the industry that builds it.

Evdokimov's professional career began in the Soviet Union's Ministry of Medium Machine-building, which was essentially the Soviet Union's nuclear agency. In 2005, he moved to Aviatechpriemka, which today is a subsidiary of defense and technology holding Rostec. From 2007-14 he served as the company's CEO. In 2014, he moved to the United Aircraft Corporation, an umbrella corporation that has sucked up the major players in Russia's aircraft industry. There, he was in charge of quality control and reliability.

But when he was arrested as part of an investigation into fraud at the MiG corporation in December, Evdokimov was acting director for quality control in the space industry at Roscosmos. He was alleged to have embezzled around $3 million from the company during 2007-09, and was one of several officials arrested in connection with a corruption probe. There has been speculation in the Russian press that he was familiar with other fraud schemes.

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What Happened?

Evdokimov was placed in a six-man pre-trial holding cell in Moscow in December. The cell was constantly monitored with CCTV cameras. According to Russian media reports, Evdokimov made no complaints about his accommodations. He remained in this cell until last month.

According to RBC, the he was moved to another detention area in February. No explanation was given for the move. The new cell was occupied by 11 other inmates, and had not yet been

outfitted in CCTV systems to monitor the area. According to news outlet Lenta.ru, most of the other inmates in the cell were accused of economic crimes.

At about 4:00 a.m. on March 18, Evdokimov's body was discovered in the cell's bathroom. Investigators identified three knife wounds — two to the heart and one to the neck. Investigators quickly moved from presumed suicide to contract killing.

According to the Kommersant newspaper, he was expected to cooperate with an investigation into fraud in the aerospace industry.

"One of the basic working theories is that he was murdered by someone who feared he would act as a witness against them on a number of different instances [of fraud]," a source close to the investigation told the Interfax news agency.

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