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EU Scraps 'Judo' From Decision to Blacklist Putin Ally Rotenberg

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Arkady Rotenberg **Mikhail Metzel / TASS**

The European Union on Wednesday changed the wording of its explanation for blacklisting a close ally of President Vladimir Putin.

In an amendment published online, the EU described Arkady Rotenberg as "a prominent Russian businessman who has close personal ties to President Putin."

"Since March 2014, Rotenberg, or his companies, have received state contracts totaling over $7 billion," it said. The statement mentioned Stroigazmontazh, a company owned by Rotenberg which is building a bridge connecting Crimea to the Russian mainland.

"Through these contracts he has financially benefited from Russian decision-makers responsible for the annexation of Crimea or the destabilization of eastern Ukraine," it added.

In the summer of 2014, the EU imposed a travel ban on Rotenberg and froze his EU assets, as part of sanctions against Putin's inner circle following the annexation of Crimea.

The original EU decision described the billionaire as "a long-time acquaintance of President Putin and his former judo sparring partner," adding: "He has developed his fortune during President Putin's tenure."

It also mentioned "several highly lucrative contracts for the preparations of the Sochi Olympic Games."

Rotenberg and Putin famously met in their youth, and share a love for martial arts.

Rotenberg appealed the ban and was partly backed by the EU's General Court. In a November 2016 ruling the Luxembourg-based court said the EU had partly failed to substantiate its decision for imposing the sanctions from July 2014 to March 2015.

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