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U.S. Commerce Secretary, Russian Shipping Company Deny Links After Paradise Leaks

November 06, 2017



Vladimir Smirnov / TASS

Russian petrochemical giant Sibur expressed surprise and indignation Monday after leaked documents revealed that U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross holds a stake in a shipping company connected to Sibur.

On Sunday, 13.4 million leaked offshore financial documents from the Bermuda-based law firm Appleby, known as the Paradise Papers, were released to the public. The information contained in the leak was reviewed by 96 media partners in the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, the same group that published the Panama Papers in 2016.

Sibur flatly denied that it had any direct links with Ross and called the leaked reports a "politically biased interpretation in certain media publications of regular commercial activities."

The company was responding to media reports that the leaked documents show Ross holding a 31 percent stake in Navigator Holdings, a shipping firm which has supplied services to Sibur.

Related article: Russian Media Spotlights Foreigners in Paradise Papers

The latest leak claims Navigator received millions of dollars from Sibur, whose shareholders include several individuals with close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Russian oligarchs Gennady Timchenko and Leonid Mikhelson as well as Kirill Shamalov, Putin's son-in-law, profited from Navigator, according to the investigative journalists.

Ross did not dispute his relationship with Sibur and told the BBC that there was "nothing improper" as the company was not under U.S. sanctions.

Timchenko and Mikhelson's natural gas company, Novatek, is on the U.S. sanctions list.

Ross is accused of misleading senators by not disclosing information about his links to Sibur during confirmation hearings.

The U.S. government and Congress have been investigating relations between current and past associates of President Donald Trump to Russian officials and business people during the 2016 elections.

Sibur characterized Ross' involvement as "normal commercial activity" which was openly reflected in the company's financial reports.

Executives maintain that Sibur selected several carriers for liquefied petroleum gas from a Russian port, including Navigator, which was never the sole contractor for the service.

A total of $15.9 million was spent on the operations or 2.8 percent of all of Sibur's expenditures on logistics.

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