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Russian Prosecutors Issue New Charges Against Kremlin Critic Browder

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William Browder (Remy de la Mauviniere / AP / TASS)

Russia has issued new charges against U.S.-born hedge fund manager William Browder, who has dismissed previous tax evasion convictions in the country as being politically motivated.

Russia branded Browder a national security threat and banned him from the country in 2005, when his Hermitage Capital fund held more than $4 billion in investments. In 2013 and 2017, Browder was convicted in absentia of tax evasion and sentenced to nine years in prison. Browder has been a vocal critic of the Kremlin administration and lobbied the passage of the Magnitsky Act in the United States in 2012 — which sanctions officials linked to human rights abuses — after the death of his lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in Russian pre-trial detention in 2009 in suspicious circumstances.

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Browder could face 20 years in prison and asset seizures on charges of "creating a criminal organization," Nikolai Atmonyev, an adviser to Russia's general prosecutor, said in a televised briefing Monday.

"This organization was created in Russia in 1997 and continues to operate," he told reporters.

Atmonyev said Russia would seek Browder's arrest and extradition under the UN's Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which allows countries without a bilateral agreement to extradite suspects.

Russian prosecutors also alleged that Browder may have been behind Magnitsky's poisoning, arguing that he "undoubtedly had a motive to remove him physically to cover up his role in previously committed crimes," though they did not include the allegation in the charges.

"I really struck a nerve with the Magnitsky Act," Browder tweeted in response.

He noted that the new charges were unveiled two days ahead of Interpol's vote for a new president. Britain's The Times publication reported Saturday that Russia's Alexander Prokopchuk, 56, is considered a favorite in the elections for the next Interpol president this week.

Russia has issued several Interpol arrest warrants against Browder, the last of which led to his brief detention in Spain earlier this year.

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