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Russian Billionaire Car Dealer Doesn't Fear Extradition From Austria

Sergei Petrov faces charges in Russia of illegally transferring money from the country.

By Pjotr Sauer

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Sergei Petrov **rolf.ru**

Founder of the Rolf car dealership and former Russian lawmaker Sergei Petrov is confident he won't be extradited from Austria, despite an international warrant for his arrest issued by Russia on Friday.

Russia's Investigative Committee accuses Petrov and managers of his company of smuggling 4 billion rubles ($60.5 million) out of the country to a Cyprus-registered company in 2014 using fake documents. On Friday, Interfax reported that Petrov had been placed on an international wanted list.

“I expected the international warrant to go out. But I am confident Austria will not extradite its own citizens,” Petrov told The Moscow Times in a telephone interview from Austria.

Petrov recently aquired Austrian citizenship while also keeping his Russian passport. Austrian law doesn’t allow for the extradition of its citizens.

Petrov said his support of “political plurality” sparked the accusations from the Russian authorities. He added that he believes that the climate in Russia means anyone can be falsely accused of crimes.

“The security services need to show that they are active and working hard. They go for those who they know aren’t loyal to the Kremlin.” Petrov said. “I have always supported political plurality.”

In 2011-2012, Petrov, then a member of parliament, supported large-scale anti-government protests against President Vladimir Putin. He also voted against the so-called Yarovaya laws that expanded the powers of law enforcement agencies and abstained from the vote on annexing Crimea.

On Friday, Petrov’s lawyer, Alexander Makarov, told a Moscow court that he believes the case against Petrov was politically motivated.

“The prosecutors started to investigate Petrov’s ties with so-called opposition members...This shows that the case isn’t based on real charges but brought for political reasons.”

Related article: Russia Car Dealer Targeted by Authorities Blames Kremlin

Petrov is ranked 114th on Forbes’ list of the 200 richest Russians and is estimated to be worth $900 million.

Despite repeated Kremlin vows to combat corruption and improve Russia’s business climate, a June state-run poll said that 71% of Russians don’t believe the country has favorable conditions for doing business, mainly due to a lack of independent courts.

Last winter’s arrest of U.S. citizen Michael Calvey, the founder of Russia’s largest investment fund, also raised concerns among foreign investors.

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