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U.S. Witness to Implicate 'Putin's Chef' Prigozhin in Election Meddling – Politico

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The U.S. witness is reportedly ready to testify on election-related discussions during a face-to-face meeting with Prigozhin. **Michael Metzel / TASS**

A secret witness will implicate Kremlin-linked catering magnate Yevgeny Prigozhin in plans to influence elections abroad at a trial next month, Politico reported Wednesday, citing a U.S. prosecutor.

The St. Petersburg-based Concord Management and Consulting firm goes on trial in the United States in April after it was charged with conspiracy to defraud the U.S. for its meddling role in the 2016 election. Prosecutors have said Prigozhin, who has ties to President Vladimir Putin, controls Concord.

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Assistant U.S. Attorney Luke Jones said at a Feb. 21 hearing that an unnamed witness is

prepared to testify about election-related discussions that took place at a face-to-face meeting with Prigozhin, Politico reported.

“The purpose of that testimony is purely to establish Prigozhin’s knowledge of the [Prigozhin-linked Internet Research Agency] activities and his oversight of that,” Jones was quoted as saying.

Jones said the discussions the witness plans to recount dealt with election meddling in a country outside the U.S., but didn't specify which country. Previous reports have linked Prigozhin to election influence campaigns in African countries.

It is unknown whether the witness has similar knowledge about Russia’s alleged interference in U.S. elections, the outlet said.

Prosecutors said Monday they plan to ask permission for one of their witnesses to testify under a pseudonym, Politico reported. The news website said it’s unclear if that witness and the witness who is prepared to testify about election-related discussions with Prigozhin are the same person.

Intelligence experts criticized the prosecution’s decision to field the witness while attempting to protect their identity from possible Russian government reprisals as fraught.

“It seems like the government is risking quite a bit for a mostly symbolic outcome,” Steven Aftergood, who studies classified information for the Federation of American Scientists, told Politico.

Aftergood noted that the outcome of the trial, which none of the 13 indicted defendants including Prigozhin are expected to attend, “is speculative at best.”

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