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Russian Foreign Minister's Secret Mistress Wields Ministry Influence, Owns Elite Property – iStories

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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. **MFA Russia / flickr**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has a secret mistress who wields significant influence within the ministry and owns several luxury properties, according to a new investigation by the Important Stories (iStories) investigative outlet published Tuesday.

Svetlana Polyakova, who has worked at the Foreign Ministry since 2014, has a "long-standing and very close" relationship with Lavrov, iStories reported, citing an unnamed source within the ministry.

iStories' investigation is its first major report since being labeled a "foreign agent" last month, a move that came amid what Kremlin critics call an effort to stamp out dissenting voices ahead of this month's parliamentary elections.

iStories reported that Polyakova and her family own properties in Russia and Britain worth

over 1 billion rubles ($13.7 million) in addition to a fleet of luxury cars. These expensive assets don't match up with Polyakova's modest salary at the Foreign Ministry and at her other businesses, iStories said.

Polyakova has appointed several close friends to key Foreign Ministry positions, iStories reported, with officials who oppose these appointments forced to resign, according to an unnamed individual who was among those who quit. The investigative outlet also said it found that several of Polyakova's friends identify her as "Svetlana Lavrova" in their phone contacts.

According to flight logs obtained by iStories, the couple has taken several trips together, including to the southern Russian resort city of Sochi where Polyakova allegedly owns a 50 million ruble ($685,750) apartment in an elite building on the Black Sea coast.

Polyakova also owns an apartment in one of Moscow's most prestigious and expensive addresses, Prechistenka 13, which iStories estimated could be worth around $9.5 million.

Polyakova's daughter, Polina, attended the Imperial College Business School in London and has since become a British resident, iStories reported. At age 21, Polina was reportedly able to sign a 999-year lease on an apartment in London's upscale Kensington district for 4.4 million pounds, equal to more than 440 million rubles at the time of purchase.

The outlet was able to identify Polyakova through a December 2014 video from the consecration ceremony of a restored Russian Orthodox cathedral where she is indentified by her full name and as a Foreign Ministry employee. In another video, she can be seen alongside Lavrov and President Vladimir Putin on a tour of the cathedral.

"You need to go through a lot of approvals to be next to the president during such events with a limited number of participants, and the fact that Polyakova was included in the 'elite entourage' speaks to her special status," iStories wrote.

In the Sept. 19 parliamentary vote, the ruling, pro-Kremlin United Russia party will seek to maintain its supermajority despite its low public approval ratings.

President Vladimir Putin named Lavrov and other figures with high approval ratings to head the list of United Russia party candidates on the ballot. Being on the list does not force Lavrov to take a seat in the legislature if elected.

iStories editor-in-chief Roman Anin prefaced the investigation by saying that the Russian ruling elite is afraid of independent investigative journalism that exposes widespread corruption hence why the Kremlin launched a "foreign agent" witch hunt.

"For many years, Sergei Lavrov, along with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, has been one of the country's most popular ministers, hence President Vladimir Putin asked both officials to enter the federal list of the United Russia party in the upcoming elections to the State Duma," Anin wrote.

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