London-Based Center for Fighting Corruption and 'Reiderstvo' in Russia Holds High-Profile Meeting in European Parliament

Topics discussed included instituting better safeguards to prevent individuals affiliated with raiding from investing their illegally obtained assets abroad

The European Parliament in Brussels.

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, April 10, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The London-based Center for Business Transparency and Countering Corporate Raids in Russia held a meeting on April 8 with Member of European Parliament Miriam Lexmann.

The center's founder Ilgar Hajiyev and its director-in-absentia Igor Bitkov participated.

The meeting was held by teleconference.

During the meeting, the participants discussed "reiderstvo" and corruption in Russia as a phenomenon that has far-reaching economic, human rights, and security implications.

Bitkov and Hajiyev also discussed their own personal stories of "reiderstvo" and the need for the EU and United States to advance existing – and propose new – safeguards to prevent individuals affiliated with raiding from investing their illegally obtained assets abroad. Such measures, among others, included: a) Making official public condemnations of "reiderstvo" and raiders; b) Letting the public know about, and publicly condemning, the most high-profile and outrageous examples of "reiderstvo," including naming perpetrators; c) Passing legislation aimed at pressuring Russia to eliminate "reiderstvo"; d) Supporting lawsuits in Russia and the West aimed at helping "reiderstvo" victims get their stolen businesses back or compensating them for their losses; and, e) Proposing or supporting sanctions against businesses, government agencies and individuals who engage in "reiderstvo."

They also discussed the center's future plans and potential avenues of collaborating with the European Parliament and other political and media organizations throughout Europe.

Lexmann is a member of the parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and Delegation for Relations with Belarus. She is an alternate on the Subcommittee on Security and Defense.

ABOUT THE CENTER

The London-based Center for Business Transparency and Countering Corporate Raids in Russia was founded to end the practice of individuals and organizations using dirty tricks and force to seize companies without compensation. The center's founder is Ilgar Hajiyev. Igor Bitkov is the director-in-absentia. Lawyers and anti-raid specialists Damir Bashirov and Aleksei Sinitsyn are its Russia representatives.

ABOUT ILGAR HAJIYEV AND THE RAID ON SDI GROUP

In mid-January 2019, a group of armed individuals stormed onto a number of large-scale residential complexes under construction in the heart of the Russian capital of Moscow.

These real estate development projects include VernadSKY on Vernadsky Prospekt, Pirogovskaya Riviera in Moscow's Mytishchi District, and Akkord Smart Kvartal in the Odintsovo District. They are owned and operated by SDI Group, a company operating mainly in Russia and the former Soviet Union, but also elsewhere abroad.

Later that month, on January 24, 2019, another group of raiders bounded into the SDI Group's offices on Kutuzovsky Prospekt and demanded the keys to the building. Some were in ordinary clothes and some wearing uniforms of the Vityaz security company, the primary security provider of properties belonging to God Nisanov, Moscow's largest commercial real estate holder and a Russian oligarch of Azerbaijani descent. In a video recording, the raid's orchestrators can supposedly be heard receiving orders from Nisanov, a partner in the projects. Russian media have since reported that Nisanov ordered the raid after a dispute with his partner, Ilgar Hajiyev, the founder of SDI Group.

After the raid, Hajiyev received a number of death threats, prompting him to flee with his family to Switzerland. The overnight loss of three prime real estate developments was a rare but devastating setback for Hajiyev, whose rags-to-riches story has become legendary in the former Soviet Union.

Even more painful for Hajiyev and the SDI Group management were the crimes committed by the perpetrators after the fact. Millions of euros in down payments for apartments, which were paid to SDI Group by hardworking Russian families, were transferred outside of the company's accounts.

Over the past nine months, SDI Group has issued appeals to Russia's Presidency and Government, the Moscow Regional Government and Mayor's Office, and an array of law enforcement agencies in the hope of securing their support to bring Nisanov and his cronies to justice. The company has also launched a number of legal cases in Russia against the individuals involved in/behind the raid.

More information can be found in this investigative story by Novaya Gazeta.

ABOUT THE BITKOV FAMILY AND THE RAID ON THE NORTH WEST TIMBER COMPANY

Igor and Irina Bitkov have learned to their everlasting sorrow that ruthless people in Russia will stop at nothing — including kidnapping and assaulting a child — to steal a successful business.

The Bitkovs built the pulp and paper-making operation North West Timber Company (NWTC) from scratch, with their business spanning from Saint Petersburg to Kaliningrad to Novodvinsk, where Igor's father worked at a mill during Soviet times.

Igor told a journalist that he developed clean technology for his operation because industrial pollution had killed too many people in the area.

As NWTC prospered, the Bitkovs borrowed money for expansion from three government-owned banks — Sberbank, Gazprombank and VTB. Borrowing from a state-owned bank can bring your operation to the attention of ruthless government officials on the lookout for ways to use their official positions to become rich.

A Sberbank executive told Igor he wanted to buy 51 percent of NWTC, but Igor said no.

In June 2007, the Bitkovs got the payback for refusing — and it was truly despicable.

Thugs kidnapped, drugged and repeatedly raped their 16-year-old daughter Anastasia over three days. Igor paid $200,000 for her return, but Anastasia's psyche had been scarred forever.

In the face of more threats, the Bitkovs fled Russia in April 2008. The three banks immediately called in the loans and gobbled up NWTC.

The Bitkovs' first overseas stop was Turkey, where Igor received a message from Russia's security service, the FSB, demanding that he return home, where he knew he would face trumped-up criminal charges. The Bitkovs then established a secret life in Guatemala.

By 2013, Russians officials had tracked them down, however, and were demanding that Guatemala extradite them. Guatemala responded by convicting the Bitkovs of buying false passports and confining them.

Some good news came in 2018, when U.S. senators took up the family's human-rights case. The Bitkovs are still in Guatemala, under house arrest.

Details can be found in this EU Observer investigative story.

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