

# Victims of Illegal Russian Corporate Takeovers Lay Out Their Cases to a Key German Parliamentarian

*Initiative Against 'Reiderstvo' in Russia Holds Meeting with Member of Parliament in Germany's Bundestag*

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, April 22, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The skyrocketing trend of illegal corporate takeovers in Russia is usually engineered by ruthless businesspeople, mafia types and corrupt public officials, two high-profile victims have told a German parliamentarian renowned for championing human rights.

Ilgar Hajiyevev and Igor Bitkov told Marcus Held by videoconference April 16 that those who engage in corporate raiding – a practice the Russians call "reiderstvo" – often launder their ill-gotten gains by buying luxury properties in Europe and the United States.



The London-based Center for Business Transparency and Countering Corporate Raids in Russia held a meeting with Member of Parliament Marcus Held at Germany's Bundestag on April 16.

"Parliamentarian Held listened intently to our discussion of the evils of 'reiderstvo,'" Hajiyevev said. "This was a great start to educating Western political leaders about the evil of this practice, which affects their countries because those who engage in raiding often launder their illegal gains in Europe and the United States."

A representative of the German company, Alcon Development GmbH, also attended the meeting.

The Azerbaijan-born Hajiyevev, who now lives in Europe, is the founder of the London-based [Center for Business Transparency and Countering Corporate Raids](#) in Russia. Bitkov, a Russian who is in Guatemala fighting a request that he be extradited to his homeland to face trumped-up criminal charges, is director-in-absentia of the center.

Hajiyevev told Held that a raid on the Moscow-area property of his company, SDI Group, was a textbook example of "reiderstvo."

The stage for the illegal takeover was set, he said, when he had a dispute in late 2018 with a business partner, Azerbaijan-born God Nisanov, over the mix of residential versus commercial property in three high-rises Hajiyevev was building on Moscow's outskirts.

In January 2019, Hajiyevev said, armed men seized the complexes, which he was erecting with his

own money after Nisanov secured the land and arranged the permits.

Later that month, armed raiders also took over SDI Group's offices on Kutuzovsky Prospekt in downtown Moscow. Hajiyev fled to Germany in the face of death threats.

Investigative media, including the Russian publications Novaya Gazeta and TheBell and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, have reported that Nisanov, Moscow's largest real estate holder, personally ordered the raids.

Footage from more than 50 surveillance cameras at SDI Group's properties showed the intruders receiving instructions from Nisanov and his team in person and by phone. Footage also showed the raiders wearing the uniforms of the Vityaz security firm, which is run by a Nisanov associate.

Additional video shows Nisanov's team seizing down-payments that thousands of people had made on apartments they had agreed to buy from SDI. The money was transferred to other companies' accounts and to the personal accounts of people associated with Nisanov. In addition, there was footage of cash from these escrow accounts being stuffed into a large duffel bag.

SDI has [posted the footage](#) to YouTube, where it has been viewed more than 141,000 times.

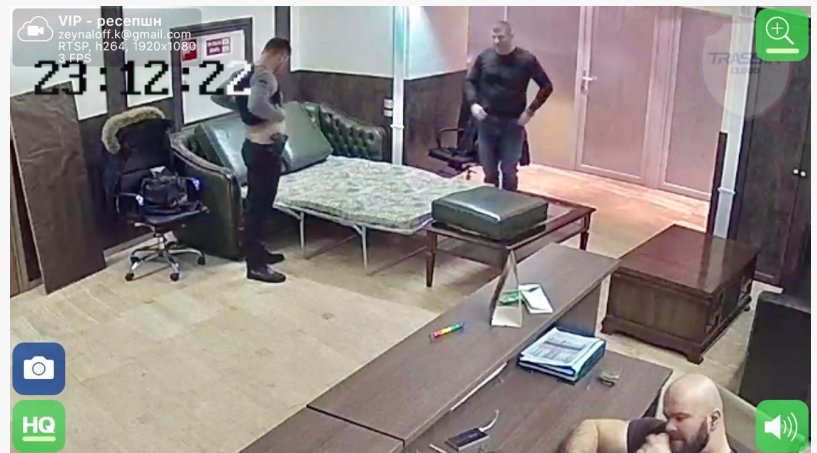
Alcon Development became party to the conflict after acquiring an 80-percent share in SDI Group.

The two companies began discussing a potential partnership as early as 2016, when Hajiyev expressed an interest in attracting German investment to his real estate development projects in Russia. Hajiyev is a friend, colleague and business advisor of Alcon Development's chief executive officer, Ziya Gaziyeu.

The negotiations continued up until the raid — circumstances that would have deterred any other company's plans to enter into such a partnership. However, Gaziyeu, a Germany-based Azerbaijani who once worked in the Bundestag, was taken aback by the lawless nature of the raid and vowed to proceed.



A still from surveillance camera footage recorded during the raid on SDI Group in Moscow, Russia.



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In a show of support for SDI Group and his partner, Hajiyev — and as a demonstration of his belief in the need to fight against corrupt business practices generally — Gaziyeu offered to finalize a merger agreement with the company.

[International media](#) have reported that the conflict has the potential to sour Germany-Russia relations.

Nisanov is known for his close relationship with Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin, Governor of the Moscow Region Andrey Vorobyev, and brothers Boris and Arkady Rotenberg, business tycoons whom the U.S. government has sanctioned.

In addition to disagreeing with Hajiyev over the amount of commercial and residential property in the high-rises, Nisanov demanded that Hajiyev give 12 percent of the projects' profits to Sobyenin, according to a Russian news report.

Meanwhile, three sprawling retail marketplaces that Nisanov runs in the Moscow area – Food City, Sadovod and Moskva – have been the targets of police raids and temporary closures in recent years. Russian news organizations reported that authorities acted after finding evidence that the mostly-cash-transaction marketplaces were being used to launder millions of dollars overseas.

Russian and European news organizations have reported that Nisanov has extensive property holdings in Europe, including a huge villa in southern France.

In 2009, the French daily Le Express reported that a British billionaire had purchased a zoo in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat that he planned to build a business on. When the zoo's closure sparked protests, the business – which some reports said was to be a luxury hotel -- was never constructed.

Instead, the land – valued at an astounding 44,000 euros per square meters at the time – ended up in the hands of Nisanov, who built a vacation villa on it.

Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat and other areas of southern France are the favored location of Russian oligarchs, who have invested millions of dollars of dubious origin there, Hajiyev said.

Hajiyev told Held that European countries need to enact laws verifying that the money wealthy Russians use to buy property on the continent does not come from criminal activities, including "reiderstvo." The legislation could be similar to London's unexplained wealth law, which forces luxury property buyers from Russia and other countries to show where their property-acquisition funds originated before a deal can go through.

Held commended Hajiyev and Bitkov on their efforts to curtail the flow of corrupt money into Europe. He also recommended that they come up with a strategy for working with the Bundestag and other European parliaments to tackle "reiderstvo" and other sources of illegal money laundering head-on.

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