
HOMES OF OPEN RUSSIA MOVEMENT'S EMPLOYEES SEARCHED

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The Moscow homes of several employees of a civic movement established by exiled former tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky have been searched by Russian police.

Open Russia said in an October 5 statement on its website that Moscow investigators searched the homes of the chief editor of the organization's website, Veronika Kutsyllo and the parents of Open Russia chairman Aleksandr Solovyov.

It said they also searched the homes of the website's administrator, Artyom Minich, and a daughter of the organizations investigative center, Andrei Konyakhin.

Well-known political observer and columnist Stanislav Belkovsky said that investigators also searched his Moscow apartment and took away his computers and telephones. Belkovsky said that they had a warrant saying the search was linked to investigations into Yukos.

The federal Investigative Committee said in a statement later that the searches were conducted in connection with a longstanding case against the former owners and executives of Yukos, which was founded by Khodorkovsky and was once Russia's largest oil company.

The statement indicated that the Russian authorities are continuing to investigate the case as part of efforts to protect itself against efforts by former Yukos shareholders to win \$50 billion in damages from the government through international courts.

It said that investigators and police searched the homes and offices of people connected with Open Russia who it claimed are "financed from abroad from the accounts of organizations controlled by Khodorkovsky" and other former Yukos officials whom Russian courts have convicted of embezzling millions of dollars through machinations with sales of the company's oil -- charges the former tycoon and his supporters say are absurd.

Yukos was dismantled after the 2003 arrest of Khodorkovsky, who was later convicted of financial crimes in two trials his supporters say were engineered by the Kremlin to thwart his funding of opposition parties, punish him for challenging President Vladimir Putin, and justify the transfer of his oil company's main production assets into state hands.

Khodorkovsky spent 10 years in prison and left Russia upon his release after being pardoned by Putin in 2013. He lives in Western Europe.

Open Russia chairman Solovyov pointed out on Twitter that he was in eighth grade in 2003, when

the case against Yukos was launched.

The searches come ahead of a March election in which Putin, who critics say has tightened control over Russia since 2000 through politically-charged moves such as the prosecution of Khodorkovsky, is widely expected to seek and secure a new six-year term.

In April, the Russian Prosecutor-General's Office declared Open Russia an "undesirable organization and accused it of conducting antigovernment activities.

Rights watchdog Amnesty International has accused the Russian authorities of attempting to impose a full ban on the group.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/open-russia-employees-homes-searched/28775040.html>

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