

THE COLOUR OF RUSSIAN MONEY PART 2: A LATVIAN LAUNDROMAT?

STEPHEN KOMARNYCKYJ. LATVIA EUROPE RUSSIA. 16 APRIL 2018



John Christmas was the head of the Latvian Parex bank's international group when he tried to draw the attention of the authorities to alleged corruption at the bank. He had to flee Latvia but his evidence might help tackle the links between European banks and the Russian mafia.

Many people were shocked when Claude Juncker congratulated Putin on his election victory in March 2018. John Christmas wasn't one of them. The former banker used to work for Latvia's Parex Bank and had fallen foul of the ties between the EU and dirty Russian money. His experience with Parex resembled the adventures of Mitch McDeere in John Grisham's "The Firm". Like McDeere he became aware that his outwardly normal employer was linked to the mob. He was employed as their 'Head of international Relationships group' in 2002. He remembers the irony of his role: "my main function was meeting representatives of western banks to convince them that we had proper corporate governance and anti-money-laundering, thus increasing our trading and borrowing limits with the western banks. In our internal meetings I gradually learned about more and more ways that Parex had falsified its financial statements."

He tried to address the fraud "anonymously at first in 2004, by giving a list of material frauds verbally to a partner at Ernst and Young. I thought he was my friend and opposed to fraud and that Ernst and Young would drop Parex

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