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Stephen Komarnyckyj tracks the financial dealings of Aleksandr Torshin, the banker behind the Russian Agent Maria Butina, to the UK.

Stephen Komarnyckyj 9 August 2019



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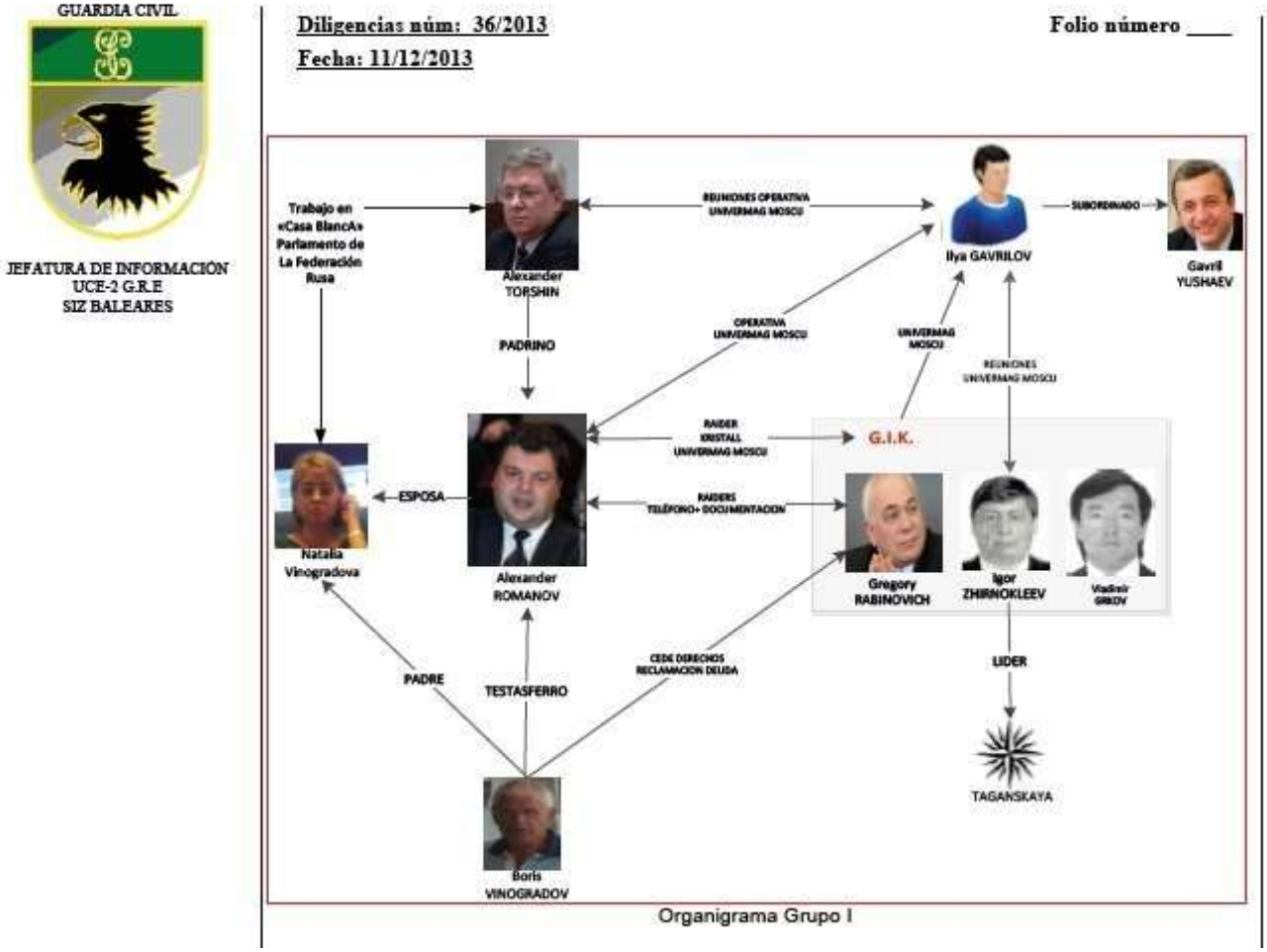
Stephen Komarnyckyj tracks the financial dealings of Aleksandr Torshin, the banker behind the Russian Agent Maria Butina, to the UK.

The Latvian bank Parex crumbled in 2008 due to serious fraud, after it was looted by its former owners, Valerijs Kargins and Viktors Krasovickis. However, there is now evidence that the bank really was a mafia and intelligence front.

A UK shell company connected to Aleksandr Torshin may have been one of the tools used to loot Parex. Torshin, a Russian banker and mobster, was responsible for handling Maria Butina. Butina pleaded guilty to acting as a foreign agent in the US in 2018.

Ilse Znotina, who is now head of Latvia's Financial Intelligence Unit, was one of a team of auditors who reviewed the bank shortly after it collapsed.

The unit found evidence of suspicious transactions, but the report remains secret. However, some of the details have emerged from a Spanish police report, company registers and the Latvian media.



Spanish Guardia Civil Intelligence File

A man named Grigorijs Rabinovics (also known as Grigory Rabinovich) was a close friend of Kargins and Krasovickis and is also an associate of Torshin. He has both Latvian and Russian passports and has owned several fashion retail outlets in Riga.

According to the Latvian site *tvnet.lv*, three of his companies – including the UK-registered Heddington Trade Limited, were loaned money by Parex in 2008.

Russian news site *Kommersant.ru* subsequently reported that Heddington Trade Limited had loaned money to the Moskva department store in Moscow. It is unlikely that the money was ever repaid.

After Parex collapsed it was purchased from its owners for a token price and the Latvian Government paid off most of its debts. The loan was illegal because, by this point, the bank had lent way in excess of regulatory limits.

Rabinovics's Riga-based fashion outlets were being wound up in 2008.

He used the loan made by Heddington Trade Limited to try to gain control of the Moskva department store. The existing management fought

back. But, Andrey Braliuk, the lawyer representing its interests, was severely assaulted on 10 February 2009. He died from his injuries three months later.

Rabinovics and his associates, including Igor Zhirnokleev, who is also an officer with Heddington Trade Limited, then took control of Moskva.

In 2013, the Spanish police arrested several Russian citizens on suspicion of money laundering, including mafia boss Aleksandr Romanov.

Why didn't the Russian authorities subsequently arrest both Rabinovics and Torshin? The Spanish police report clearly links them to the Moskva store which was one of several money laundering operations. They describe Torshin as the mafia "Godfather" – *padrino* – and Romanov as the "front-man" of the organisation in Spain.

Torshin had been due to attend Romanov's birthday party in August 2013 but cancelled his trip. He had apparently been tipped-off, perhaps by the Russian authorities, that he might be arrested.

It is increasingly difficult to distinguish between the state, the mafia and the security services in Russia.

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Torshin is simultaneously a state banker, a politician, an intelligence asset with close links to Russia's FSB, and a mafia boss. He first started targeting the National Rifle Association in 2011, and his protégé Maria Butina was jailed earlier this year for covertly acting as an agent of the Russian Federation.

But, why haven't the British authorities investigated a UK-registered company which apparently provides a link between Russian interference in US elections and alleged Russian underworld bosses?

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THIS ARTICLE WAS FILED UNDER

Foreign Affairs, Russia

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