

# Smear Campaign Starts Against Business Owner Fighting Russian Corporate Raiding

*Raiders circulate defamatory fake news originating in 'paid-for' blog posts written by discredited journalist, formerly convicted of extortion*

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, March 23, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A torrent of defamatory fake news about Ilgar Hajiyevev, who lost his real estate business in the Moscow area to armed raiders, began circulating in Russian media and social media last week.

The smear campaign started after [Igor Bitkov](#), another high-profile victim of Russian corporate raiding, agreed to join Hajiyevev's anti-raiding efforts and after news surfaced that members of the European Parliament and U.S. senators had become interested in the issue.



Stills from surveillance footage taken during the raid on SDI Group.

Hajiyevev lost his Russian business, SDI Group, in January 2019 when his partner, God Nisanov, sent armed guards to seize high-rises that Hajiyevev was building in the Moscow area. The two had disagreed over the mix of residential and commercial property in the complexes.

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Often, Russian politically powerful businessmen pay off tax authorities, police, attorneys, and corporate registrars and commit fraud in the process of criminal takeovers.”

*Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., Atlantic Council, On 'Reiderstvo' for the HuffPost*

Hajiyevev, who fled in the face of death threats, said the smear campaign is aimed at falsely painting him as a criminal to try to divert attention from the fact that he is a victim of illegal corporate raiding, or reiderstvo. “It shows the raiders fear repercussions from the international community for what they did,” said Hajiyevev, who is now living in Germany, where he has a business.

Bitkov, whose own corporate raiding story includes violence against his family and death threats, has become a poster boy of reiderstvo worldwide. Several weeks ago he agreed to join Hajiyevev's anti-raiding campaign by becoming director-in-absentia of Hajiyevev's London-based [Center for Business Transparency and Countering Corporate Raids in Russia](#).

Bitkov lost his successful paper and pulp business in Russia to a raid orchestrated by well-connected bankers and others in the 2000s. His family fled to Guatemala, where Russian government pressure for their extradition to face trumped-up charges back home led to the Guatemalans putting them under house arrest.

The human rights violations against the Bitkovs were so appalling that several U.S. senators,

including Florida's Marco Rubio, have issued public statements of support for them. Bill Browder, who persuaded Congress to pass the anti-raiding-focused Magnitsky Act after losing his own business – Hermitage Capital – in a raid in Russia, has helped galvanize American political support for Bitkov.

The smear campaign against Hajiyeu originated in blogs written by the discredited journalist Oleg Lure, who was convicted in the late 2000s of fraud and of extorting money from then-Russian Senator Vladimir Sloutsker and his wife, Olga. Unscrupulous journalists in Russia often take money to attack people in print, online, or radio or television.

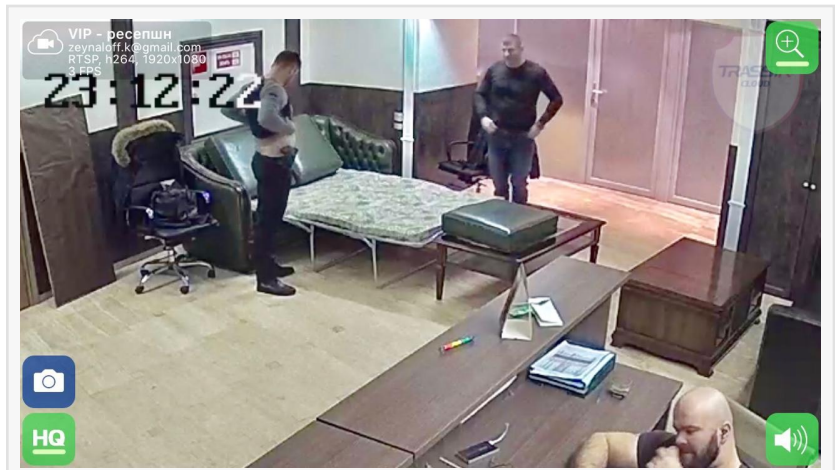
One of Lure's accusations was that Russian law enforcement agencies have several outstanding criminal cases against Hajiyeu, including one for assault in mid-2018 that prompted him to flee the country. In fact, Hajiyeu has never been questioned by Russian law enforcement officials on any matter, and lived in Russia until January 2019.

Another allegation was that Hajiyeu swindled dozens of Russians who paid for, but had yet to receive, apartments in the Moscow-area high-rises he was building. In fact, reputable Russian news organizations have written investigative stories saying that people associated with Nisanov stole millions of dollars of the apartment owners' escrow money from an SDI Group account that the associates seized during the raid against Hajiyeu.

One of the conspiracy-theory claims in Lure's blogs is that Hajiyeu, Bitkov and Browder are part of a criminal syndicate behind the launch of the anti-raiding center.

Another is that stories in reputable Russian media that have supported Hajiyeu were paid for by former [Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky](#), whose multibillion-dollar oil business was raided, and his Open Russia foundation. Western human-rights organizations maintain that Khodorkovsky's eight-year imprisonment in the 2000s was on trumped-up charges. They contend that Khodorkovsky, who was released in 2013 and now lives in London, was actually a victim of political persecution.

In fact, Hajiyeu does not know Browder or Khodorkovsky. The only thing that unites them is that



Surveillance cameras captured thousands of hours of footage during and after the raid on SDI Group.



The raid on SDI Group ensued after a disagreement between the company's founder, Ilgar Hajiyeu, and his partner, God Nisanov.

they all lost their businesses to corporate raiding.

“To be mentioned in the same breath as Mr. Browder and Mr. Khodorkosvky actually lends credibility to my cause,” Hajiyev said. “Everyone in the world knows what happened to them.”

Using a typical disinformation strategy, those behind the false allegations against Hajiyev gravitated them step by step from Lure’s blogs to low-reputation Russian media and then to higher-reputation media. All of these disseminators ran the accusations and conspiracy theories, but offered no evidence that the allegations were true, and did not attempt to contact Hajiyev for commentary.

Hajiyev said his campaign to abolish Russian corporate raiding is just getting started. One of his SDI Group business partners will meet with a prominent member of the European Parliament in Brussels in April, with Hajiyev and Bitkov participating by teleconference. Meetings with four other MEPs have also been agreed to, although the exact date will be scheduled sometime next month due to the coronavirus situation.

Meetings with members of the U.S. Congress are also being arranged, with dates to be announced soon.

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