

Interpol Asked to Explain Refusal to Track Down Browder

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Interpol must explain why it has rejected Moscow's two requests to put British hedge fund head and anti-corruption campaigner William Browder on its search list, the Interior Ministry said Saturday.

The decision is the latest twist in a long-running battle between the government of President Vladimir Putin and Browder, whose investment company Hermitage Capital was once the largest investor in Russia's equity market.

A Russian court has sentenced U.S.-born Browder in absentia to nine years in prison for large-scale fraud in a case Interpol described as "predominantly political" when the agency refused Moscow's first request to locate Browder in May.

On Friday, Interpol said it had turned down a second request from Russia to locate and arrest Browder, who lives in Britain and now wages a campaign to expose corruption and rights

violations.

The Interior Ministry said it was "perplexed" by the decision and demanded that Interpol explain its reasoning without delay.

"The ministry continues to consider Interpol an organization that is not guided by political decisions or value judgments," the ministry said in a statement posted on its website.

"Consequently, the Russian Interior Ministry counts on receiving in the near future a comprehensive explanation of the official position of Interpol's General Secretariat ... in relation to its refusal to execute the request."

Browder has spearheaded an international campaign to expose corruption and human rights violations in Russia following the death in 2009 of Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer working for Hermitage and investigating a \$230 million tax fraud.

Magnitsky was arrested shortly after alleging that Russian officials were involved in the fraud and later died in prison while awaiting trial, causing an international uproar.

A Russian court on July 11 found Magnitsky posthumously guilty of tax evasion, triggering harsh criticism from the West, and also sentenced Browder to nine years in prison.

Browder is wanted in connection with what Russian investigators say was the illegal acquisition of 131 million Gazprom shares at domestic-market prices between 1999 and 2004. As a result of Browder's alleged dealings, the state lost 2.9 billion rubles, investigators say.

In May, the ministry asked Interpol to issue a "blue notice" for Browder, which would have required all 190 member states to collect additional information about his identity, location and activities. The Interpol General Secretariat rejected that request, citing "the predominantly political nature" of the case.

In July, Browder was tried in absentia in Moscow's Tverskoi District Court on charges of stealing more than \$15 million in state funds and was sentenced to nine years in prison.

Browder is unlikely to be extradited from Britain, where he lives. But inclusion in Interpol's database would have alerted other member countries to look out for him with a view to arresting him and handing him over.

Material from Moscow Times and RIA Novosti is included in this report.

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