

Man in Witness Protection Over Mob Case Shot Dead Near Moscow

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The  **Moscow Times**

A man in Russia's federal witness protection program as part of an ongoing case against an alleged mob boss was shot dead Tuesday in the Moscow region, Interfax reported.

The man was identified as Alexei Zakharov, who was "under state protection as a witness in a criminal case against Dmitry Belkin, a leader of the Orekhov organized crime group, which is believed to be responsible for dozens of murders committed in the 1990s," Interfax cited an unidentified source in law enforcement as saying.

A statement on the Investigative Committee's website did not disclose the victim's name and made no mention of a case against members of an organized crime group. It said a case had been opened on charges of murder and illegal possession of weapons, which together carry a maximum punishment of 19 years behind bars.

Zakharov was killed early Tuesday morning in the suburb of Odintsovo when an unidentified attacker fired at least eight shots at him as he walked to his car, parked outside of his home, Interfax reported.

The victim's boss, Sergei Zhurboi, director of a market in Odintsovo, also testified against Belkin in the ongoing trial of the Orekhov gang, the news agency reported. In early June, Zhurboi survived a murder attempt believed to be connected to the case, following a similar attempt in 2010.

The Investigative Committee and Prosecutor General's Office had been building a case against the Orekhov gang for years, but only managed to get Belkin in their sights in March 2012, when Spain agreed to extradite him, according to Interfax.

Belkin is accused of 27 murders and seven attempted murders. One of the group's victims from the 1990s was a senior investigator for the Prosecutor General's Office who had started looking into their crimes.

Investigators say the gang also chalked up a fair number of killings for "educational purposes," in which they murdered their own members for violating the group's internal rules.

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