

# Three Top Managers Leave Russia's RBC Media

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Russia's independent media scene suffered a major blow on Friday as the country's biggest independent media holding, RosBusinessConsulting (RBC), lost several senior managers. There are concerns that the reason behind the move is pressure from the authorities — and the self-censorship of its owner.

Three top managers at the media holding resigned on Friday. According to information obtained by The Moscow Times, editor-in-chief of the RBC newspaper, Maxim Solus, was fired by Mikhail Prokhorov, the billionaire owner of the holding.

RBC's chief editor Yelizaveta Osetinskaya and chief editor of rbc.ru Roman Badanin then announced that they would resign.

RBC's general director Nikolai Molybog was quoted in a press release as saying, “We couldn't come to an agreement in regard to certain important questions and made a decision to separate.”

Molybog thanked the three managers for their contribution to the company. The resignations are the latest in a series of events interpreted by many observers as pressure on RBC's editorial policy.

It began with Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) raiding Prokhorov's ONEXIM Group's Moscow premises in mid-April on suspicion of tax evasion.

A number of analysts told The Moscow Times off the record that the raids came as a result of the Kremlin's displeasure with RBC's extended coverage of the Panama Papers leak. RBC previously reported on businessmen connected to President Vladimir Putin and on the career of his daughter.

This week, a criminal case was launched by Russia's Interior Ministry against RBC on suspicion of alleged fraud.

The plaintiff, former RBC shareholder Alexander Panov was quoted by Russian media as saying that police will investigate RBC's general director Nikolai Molybog, his deputy Yekaterina Kruglova, financial director Igor Selivanov, deputy director Alexander Kononenko, and other top managers at the company.

Police estimated the alleged damage at one million rubles (\$15,400), Kommersant reported, citing the police.

“Prokhorov's nerves are frazzled,” a source at the holding told The Moscow Times on condition of anonymity. The source said that the main reason behind Friday's departures could have been RBC's article on May 11 about ongoing plans for a large oyster farm located next to a building known as “Vladimir Putin's palace” — a 17,700-square-meter mansion in Russia's Black Sea resort of Gelendzhik.

The in-depth report mentioned that the palace and the farm are registered to the same individual.

Mikhail Prokhorov bought 51 percent of the shares in RBC for \$80 million in 2009 after the holding went into debt following the 2008 global financial crisis.

Slon reported that 13 other RBC employees have also announced their resignations on Friday.

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