

## RUSSIA

# The Deputy PM, The Oligarch, And His Lover: New Navalny Exposé Highlights Tycoon's Ties To Kremlin Bigwig

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By Mike Eckel

Oleg Deripaska is a billionaire Russian metals tycoon who **throws lavish parties** in Davos, Switzerland, has been barred from the United States, and has done business with President Donald Trump's now-indicted former campaign manager.

He's also well connected with the Kremlin; Russia's foreign minister once helped him in efforts to persuade U.S. government officials to grant him a visa.

Now, according to a new exposé published by anticorruption crusader Aleksei Navalny, there's more evidence of Deripaska's close government ties.

Published on February 8, Navalny's exposé allegedly shows a deputy Russian prime minister being wined and dined by Deripaska on the tycoon's yacht off the coast of Norway.

The report draws on photographs and video published in 2016 on the social media account of a Belarusian woman who says she had an affair with Deripaska.

The woman, who has identified herself as Nastya Rybka, appeared on Russian TV in 2017 where she discussed working for a model agency.

On her **Instagram account**, Rybka posted photos and videos showing her and Deripaska together on his yacht. One, posted in August 2016, features Deripaska standing on his yacht and speaking with Sergei Prikhodko, a deputy prime minister and top foreign policy advisor. Deripaska can be heard addressing Prikhodko by his first and middle names -- a common form of address.

### **'Scandalous Sensationalism'**

Navalny also said his investigators found public records that said Prikhodko spent several days on Deripaska's yacht and was flown there on Deripaska's private jet.

In another video, Deripaska can be heard explaining why relations between the United States and Russia are so tense, something he appears to attribute in part to a former official who used to oversee Russia relations at the State Department and who worked on a Soviet whaling trawler years ago.

**WATCH: Aleksei Navalny's Report On Links Between Oleg Deripaska And Sergei Prikhodko (with English subtitles)**

In his report, Navalny goes on to claim that Prikhodko's sojourn on Deripaska's yacht effectively amounted to a bribe from the oligarch. He also listed the deputy prime minister's hugely valuable property holdings in and around Moscow.

Speaking to the Associated Press by e-mail, a spokesman for Deripaska denounced Navalny's report, saying it contained "scandalous and mendacious assumptions...driven by sensationalism."

"We totally refute these outrageous false allegations in the strongest possible way," he added.

Deripaska is one of Russia's wealthiest men, having amassed a fortune in the metals industry, which he now holds primarily through a company called Basic Element.

### **Friends In High Places**

In the 2000s, Deripaska was barred from entering the United States, after the State Department raised questions about possible connections to Russian organized crime groups.

At one point, he enlisted the help of a prominent Washington lobbying firm, and the services of former Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole, in trying to reverse the State Department's refusal to issue a visa. Congressional lobbying records also show another Washington firm was enlisted by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov for help with the visa issue.

In 2009, the FBI authorized his entry into the United States.

Since that time, however, Deripaska has been able to enter the country using a Russian diplomatic passport.

Deripaska was also a business partner of Paul Manafort, a former adviser of Dole's and a longtime Washington lobbyist. The two established a joint venture to invest in a Ukrainian telecommunications venture, but the deal later fell apart and Deripaska sued Manafort in a U.S. court.

Manafort was Trump's campaign manager in 2016 until news about his lobbying work for the Russia-friendly Ukrainian ex-President Viktor Yanukovich emerged. In October 2017, he was indicted by a U.S. grand jury on money laundering, conspiracy, and other charges. He has pleaded not guilty.

### **Anticorruption Crusader**

Navalny, a charismatic lawyer who rails against corruption, has long been a thorn in the Kremlin's side. He and his team have published exposés exploring the wealth of Prime Minister **Dmitry Medvedev**, Defense Minister **Sergei Shoigu**, Kremlin spokesman **Dmitry Peskov**, and Prosecutor-General **Yury Chaika**.

Last year, he released a video examining a Russian island near the Finnish border where a venerable country house has been restored and, he alleged, been used by President Vladimir Putin for holidays.

With witty exposes and sharp-tongued tirades, Navalny has built a national following and become a potent political force in Russia. He garnered substantial votes in the Moscow mayor's election in 2013, and he had sought to run in next month's presidential election, challenging Putin.

But election officials have barred him for the race due to an earlier conviction on financial crimes, a charge he and his supporters have called politically motivated.