

MY LIFE UNDER SANCTIONS IN SYRIA

Suad Aldarra
Opinion&Analysis



Belfast’s got that buzz was the tagline for the city when we lived there years ago. It never really rang true, or at least not in the way the tourism officials hoped. It does now though

Róisín Ingle
Life



MORTGAGE MARKET SHAKE-UP AND WHAT’S IN IT FOR YOU

Joanne Hunt
Money Matters

Lawyers in Ireland linked to Putin’s agency for Russian ‘soft power’

Investigation

CONOR GALLAGHER
Crime and Security Correspondent

A Kremlin-backed legal fund, which EU security agencies allege acts as an extension of Russian intelligence in some countries, has been operating in Ireland for more than 10 years, an investigation by The Irish Times has found.

port and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad – known by its Russian acronym Pravfond – is intended to fund legal services for Russian expatriates who get into difficulty with the law overseas.

However, in other countries, the fund is an instrument of Russian “soft power”, designed to improve the image of the Kremlin overseas and limit support

for Ukraine in its defensive war against Russia, according to the EU Commission and various European security services.

It is also used to provide cover stories for Russian spies and to act as a safety net for Russia agents who are detained overseas, according to EU security officials. The extent of Pravfond’s operations and its presence in Ireland are detailed in an archive of about 50,000 emails and 20,000 attached documents from Pravfond, ob-

tained by journalists from Danish public broadcaster DR and shared with The Irish Times and a network of more than 20 news media outlets including Le Monde in France and Der Spiegel in Germany.

In the past, Pravfond has funded the legal defence of notorious arms trafficker Viktor Bout, known by the nickname the Merchant of Death, and a Russian agent who assassinated a Chechen separatist in Berlin in 2019.

The newly disclosed records show it funds pro-Russia propaganda outlets in various EU countries with the aim of improving the overseas image of the Kremlin regime. In relation to Pravfond’s links to Ireland, the internal records show the fund has provided much of the funding for a “legal support centre” for Russian expatriates in the country since 2013.

The centre is run by Elizaveta Donnery, a well-respected Russian solicitor who has been

living in Ireland since 2000 and operates a law practice in Clontarf, north Dublin.

As part of her contracts with Pravfond, Ms Donnery has provided free legal advice to hundreds of Russian compatriots living in Ireland.

She also writes legal advice columns for Russian-speaking media in Ireland and provides updates to Pravfond and the Russian embassy as part of the agreement.

In return, she received up to

€35,000 a year from Pravfond. According to the copies of contracts and funding applications, Ms Donnery received support from Pravfond every year, except in 2019 and 2020.

The records also show Pravfond was in contact on several occasions with another Russian solicitor based in Dublin, Olga Shajaku.

There is no suggestion that Ms Donnery or Ms Shajaku have engaged in illegal activity or intelligence gathering.

Ms Shajaku co-owns Word Perfect, one of the largest translations services in the State which has previously provided translation services to An Garda Síochána.

Neither Ms Donnery, Ms Shajaku, Pravfond or the Russian embassy in Dublin responded to detailed and repeated requests for comment.

➔ Organisation accused of spreading Putin’s influence: pages 6&7

Pressure builds on Israel to halt Gaza offensive

Majority of EU states back plan to review trade relations as humanitarian fears grow

JACK POWER
in Brussels and
JACK HORGAN-JONES

International pressure is mounting on Israel to end its military offensive in Gaza and to allow in significantly more humanitarian aid.

A majority of EU states yesterday backed a proposal to review the union’s trade relations with Israel, while Britain suspended talks with the Israelis on a new trade deal.

Israel’s near-three month blockade of food and aid supplies to the Palestinian enclave has seen a number of EU states row in behind a fresh effort to pressure it to change course.

Ireland was one of 17 of the EU’s 27 states to vote for a review of the bloc’s trade agreement with Israel. The shift in the positions of several European governments follows dire warnings about conditions inside the Gaza Strip.

Aid agencies have repeatedly warned that Israel’s blockade

since March 2nd has put the 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza at risk of famine, as food, fuel and other supplies begin to run out. The United Nations said yesterday it had received permission from Israel for about 100 aid trucks to enter, though these had yet to be distributed.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Harris said the high level of support inside the EU to review the bloc’s agreement with Israel reflected the “grave concerns” about what was happening in Gaza.

‘Abominable’ situation British foreign minister David Lammy said the decision to suspend trade talks was a response to the “abominable” situation in the enclave. He accused Israel’s far-right government of “planning to drive Gazans from their homes into a corner of the strip in the south, and permit them a fraction of the aid that they need”.

France and Canada also said they would take “concrete ac-

tions” against Israel if it did not stop the offensive and lift restrictions on aid entering Gaza. UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher said conditions in Gaza were so bad that as many as 14,000 babies could die in the next two days, if more aid was not allowed in.

Asked by the BBC for more details, a UN human rights commission spokesman said “we are pointing to the imperative of getting supplies in to save an estimated 14,000 babies suffering from severe acute malnutrition in Gaza, as the IPC partnership has warned about”.

The IPC is a multi-agency tool used to examine food security. In an analysis earlier this month, it said nearly 71,000 children in Gaza under the age of five are expected to be acutely malnourished over the next 11 months, and of these, 14,100 cases are expected to be severe. Responding to criticism, Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu said his country was engaged in a “war of civilisation over barbarism” and vowed it would “continue to defend itself by just means until total victory”.

Ireland and Spain previously called for a review of the EU’s “association agreement” with Israel, which governs relations,



A boy stands near the bodies of Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes at the al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital in central Gaza yesterday. PHOTOGRAPH: EYAD BABA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

whether Israel’s actions in Gaza breached commitments in the agreement to respect human rights.

EU foreign affairs chief Kaja Kallas said the “catastrophic” situation in Gaza had swung a “huge” majority in favour of the proposal, during a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels yesterday.

➔ Israeli forces kill at least 55 Palestinians in air strikes: page 8

Man questioned in Gaine case free to leave country

CONOR LALLY
and BARRY ROCHE

A man who was arrested on suspicion of the murder of Michael Gaine (56) in Co Kerry, before being released without charge on Monday, is free to leave the country.

It is believed that he has an extensive support network in another country where he previously lived.

Garda sources said the murder investigation would be much more difficult if the man relocated abroad, as he could not be called for questioning if further evidence was gathered.

The individual, who was known to Mr Gaine, was detained on Sunday and released on Monday night.

He is in his 50s and has lived much of his life abroad. If he moved abroad again, he could

only be extradited to Ireland if charges against him were approved by the DPP.

The investigation into the death of Mr Gaine, who was last seen alive in Kenmare in March, has reached no firm conclusions, with no cause of death or firm motive for the killing established. There is also no evidence at this point that could be used to underpin a criminal charge against anyone in relation to the death, which is assumed to have been a murder.

The man arrested and released is not bound by any restrictions, such as a travel ban or being ordered to surrender his passport. He is free to live where he wishes and enjoys the presumption of innocence.

He had moved to Tralee recently and was living in an apartment there. Gardai were aware of his whereabouts as they had

previously spoken to him about Mr Gaine’s disappearance and taken a witness statement.

He was detained on Sunday, about 48 hours after partial human remains, believed to be those of Mr Gaine, were discovered. The remains were found in slurry as it was being spread on fields beside the Gaine farmyard at Carrig East, just north of Kenmare. Gardai are continuing to look for body parts.

Weather

Dry and sunny with the chance of a few showers. Highs of 17-22 degrees

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Home News

School places: A more streamlined system for applying to second-level schools will be piloted in some areas later this year. Page 5

Care units: Tusla should replace its three special care detention units with a single ‘centre of excellence campus’, says a review. Page 2

World News



Ukraine: EU states have launched a flurry of diplomatic efforts to maintain pressure on Russia and convince the US not to walk away from peace talks. Page 9

Business + Commercial Property

Shannon: The Government has been asked to consider a ‘high-speed bus network’ for the Shannon airport area to take traffic from Dublin. Page 14

Ardagh talks: Ardagh Group’s debt restructuring talks with a group of bondholders have broken down. Page 15

Sports Wednesday

Camogie: At Dublin training last night ‘every player’ was in agreement that change is needed on the issue of skorts when Special Congress sits tomorrow. Page 23

Soccer: Manchester closed in on Champions League qualification by beating Bournemouth last night. Page 25

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