

# MY FEAR OF THE MOBSKI

By EMILY COMPSTON. The London Express (daily), December 10, 1996.

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Millionaire Russian entrepreneur Alexandre Konanykhine is to fight deportation from the U.S., claiming he would be murdered by Moscow mobsters if forced to return to his homeland.

Konanykhine is a vocal campaigner against corruption and organised crime in Russia.

But he is accused by Russian authorities of embezzling more than £5 million from the Moscow bank he founded.

Konanykhine, 30, is now in an American prison facing deportation to Russia because of a "goodwill" gesture by the FBI to the KGB.

Yesterday he said from his prison cell: "If the judge orders my deportation it will mean immediate death for me.

"I have documents to prove that the Russian mafia had a couple of contracts out on my life."

His lawyer Michael Maggio added: "Mr. Konanykhine is being used as a neo-political football in an effort by the U.S. to portray Russian society as something it is not - a state where a rule of law prevails.

"In fact, it is a society that is astonishingly corrupt, where organised crime elements play a dominating role.

"I believe he has been targeted by the Russian government because he has been so vocal against the control of organised crime."

The entrepreneur fled to the U.S. in 1992 after he claimed that KGB agents he hired to protect him from Moscow mobsters demanded more money.

Only months ago Konanykhine was living an opulent lifestyle with his wife Elena in a £190,000 apartment in the exclusive Watergate complex in Washington DC. Neighbours included Republican leader Bob Dole.

He was also a sought-after dinner guest among Washington's social elite. From an office near the White House he ran the U.S. bureau of Greatis USA, which is one of the largest advertising agencies in Russia.

Even before Konanykhine's arrival in the U.S. he had established himself as an entrepreneur. By the age of 24 he had amassed a personal fortune of £64.5 million and founded the now defunct All-Russian Exchange Bank - the first private bank to receive a licence from the Russian authorities. At one time, his banking, real estate and commodity empire was said to be worth nearly £200 million.

He even accompanied Russian President Boris Yeltsin on his first official visit to the U.S. in 1992.

But now he is locked up in a cramped cell at a federal prison in Northern Virginia and is fighting an

immigration charge of lying on an application to extend his work visa.

Konanykhine claims it is his personal campaign against KGB-organised crime that ensures he faces certain death if returned to Russia.

He added yesterday: "It is not a good feeling knowing I can be sent to death in Russia at any time." His court appeal against the deportation decision will be heard next year.

At an immigration hearing in July an FBI agent testified that Russian criminals in New York had taken out a contract on Konanykhine. But federal prosecutors said allowing Konanykhine to stay would be a "travesty of justice". Prosecutor Eloise Rosas alleged he was a tax evader, draft dodger and a "deadbeat dad" in Russia. Konanykhine denies he has any children.

Court papers say Russian authorities asked for U.S. help to trap Konanykhine in 1994.

A high-profile Russian prosecutor, Alexandre Volevodz, repeated the request after the FBI opened an office at the U.S. embassy in Moscow that year.

In an effort to build good relations with the Russian authorities, the FBI suggested they look into possible immigration violations by him, and in July this year he was arrested.

But Konanykhine claims he was targeted because of his anti-corruption campaign, which he took up with Boris Yeltsin, following his escape to the U.S.

Volevodz personally replied to his correspondence with the president and asked for more details about alleged organised crime. But authorities later claimed Konanykhine had been embezzling cash from his bank.

Konanykhine's lawyers argue he transferred money to private accounts to stop it being stolen.

He claimed: "We have documents that show correspondence between the U.S. legal attache in Russian and the director of the FBI.

"It shows the Russian government threatened the U.S. with termination of legal assistance unless I was deported."

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[Home](#)