

Kommersant learned that a top manager and a lawyer of a large financial pyramid scheme operating under the guise of an investment company QBF were arrested in Moscow. The alleged swindlers were transferring the money they received to offshore companies by providing fraudulent reports to the clients that their investments were made into serious financial portfolios. According to preliminary calculations of the investigation, the theft of about 5-7 billion rubles may be involved. Law enforcers think that part of this money could have been legalized by QBF management through real estate development projects, for example the construction of Gribovsky Les housing estate in Odintsovsky District of Moscow Region.

Moscow's Tverskoy District Court remanded in custody 30-year-old co-founder of QBF LLC, former head of the company's Cyprus branch Zelimkhan Munayev and 47-year-old lawyer of this structure Yevgeniya Rossiyeva. Both are the defendants in a criminal case opened in April 2021 by investigative department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on especially big swindle (part 4 of article 159 of the Criminal Code of Russian Federation).

According to Kommersant, law enforcers have been investigating unlawful activities of QBF representatives for over a year. Last week, as part of the investigation, officers of Main Directorate for Ecology and Crime Control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs together with their colleagues from Department of Internal Affairs for ZAO, Main Directorate of Internal Affairs of Russia for Moscow and Moscow Department of Federal Security Service, supported by special forces, conducted more than 30 searches in Moscow and St. Petersburg. As part of these activities, Messrs. Munayev and Rossiyeva were detained. The former lives on Nikolaeva Street, not far from the Government House.

When the law enforcers arrived, he barricaded himself in his apartment and refused to open it for three hours. He surrendered only after the riot police began to open the door with crowbars and sledgehammers.

It is amusing that at this point problems of a different nature arose. Zelimkhan Munayev, who had now decided to surrender, could not open the half-broken metal door

from the inside - the latches were jammed. As a result, the door had to be completely demolished.

The law enforcement officers had no problems with Ms. Rossiyeva, who lived on Udaltsova Street. After that the investigative team went to the head office of QBF, which occupies several floors in the "City of capitals" complex in Moscow-City (Presnenskaya embankment, 8, building 1). Documentation and electronic media were seized there. Among other things, investigators found a memo for managers, which advised how to behave in case of a visit from law enforcement agencies. It should be noted that at the same address on Presnenskaya Embankment a number of companies under a single acronym QBF are also registered, which also appear in the materials of the investigation.

At the same time, operatives in St. Petersburg detained Vladimir Pakhomov, director of the branch network of the company QBF. He has already been charged with fraud, but the investigation did not request his arrest.

As the officers of the Main Directorate for Combating Economic Crimes and Corruption found out during the operational and investigative activities, the company attracted funds from citizens under the guise of investing in financial portfolios not only in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, but also through a branch network in the Sverdlovsk, Tyumen, Murmansk regions, and Bashkiria. And the main emphasis was on wealthy clients, who according to some sources had access to budget money. "Some QBF managers allegedly said that the calculation was that these people would not go to the police if they lost their money, because they could not prove that it was legitimate.

However, among the official victims, according to Kommersant, there are still those who have transferred 200-300 million rubles to the alleged fraudsters, and one even gave 1 billion rubles to the "trust management".

Moreover, such people learned about the opportunity to earn on investments of about 20%, as a rule, through the so-called word of mouth. And some dividends were really paid to them at the expense of subsequent investors. In this way the firm's reputation was maintained and, in fact, an inflow of new wealthy investors was guaranteed.

Ordinary clients, who trusted QBF with relatively small amounts, were usually guided by positive online reviews of the company. Their problems began when they intended to withdraw their funds from QBF. Prior to that, they were all confident that their money was working and generating profits because managers sent them fictitious monthly and quarterly reports by e-mail.

"Extremely negative impression of QB finance. As long as you carry the money to them - everything is fine. As soon as you try to take it back - problems begin. The money is not returned. Managers stop answering the phone. If you want to lose your money - you may come to QBF," the company's clients say, according to Kommersant, "It's a common pyramid scheme, which takes money into trust management, a certain percentage may be withdrawn, but when you want to withdraw all your money, you won't receive anything. I have been withdrawing for a year, the manager always disappears, no one answers the phone".

As a result, many deceived depositors were of the opinion that the complimentary reviews of QBF were written either by the company managers themselves or by someone on their order. At the moment several dozens of people are victims in this case, including citizens of Ukraine and companies from Liechtenstein. The damage caused to them was estimated at about 2 billion rubles. The total amount owed to clients is estimated at between 5 billion and 7 billion rubles.

As the police discovered, the main investment agreement was concluded between an individual and the Cyprus-based QB CAPITAL CY LTD (QCCI LTD) and referred to the transfer of funds into "trust management". This was done in order to circumvent Russian legislative norms in the sphere of investment activities, since such service was not subject to licensing and did not fall under the supervision of the Central Bank. Clients were also explained that investing in foreign jurisdictions is the most attractive and profitable for them. As a screen, according to investigators, until 2017, the alleged swindlers used LLC QBF, which had all the necessary licenses of the Central Bank. It was with this LLC that clients signed additional agreements on brokerage services, trust management of funds, etc., believing that they were dealing with a legally operating organization. In the meantime investor's funds were immediately deposited to the account of QCCI LTD and then transferred to the current accounts of other non-resident companies, as well as FFIN BROKERAGE SERVICES INC (Belize), LA CASA INTERNATIONAL LTD (Marshall Islands), NOA Circle LTD (Nicosia).

In August 2018, when the Cypriot authorities had questions about the activities of QCCI LTD, whose director was then Zelimkhan Munaev, the organization was liquidated. Its place was taken by new non-resident companies: White Lake Management Ltd (Cayman Islands) and Hong Kong-based Simtelligence Company Limited.

All of the funds raised ostensibly for investment were still at the disposal of the alleged pyramid organizers. At the same time, some of them were actively legalized in Russia through real estate development projects. One of them, according to the investigators, could be, for example, the construction of Residential Complex "Gribovsky Forest" in Odintsovo district of Moscow region. Housing erects company "M1 Development" the founder of which is 33-year-old Roman Shpakov. He is also a beneficiary and founder of a number of companies under a single acronym of QBF. However, the investigators are unlikely to be able to ask him any questions in the near future.

According to Kommersant, in January 2021, when the clouds over his brainchild began to thicken, he left for the UAE, where he now resides.

But so far it is Mr. Shpakov that the investigation considers a possible organizer of the criminal scheme.

QBF attributed the criminal prosecution of its structure to the squabbles of certain former functionaries of Yekaterinburg and the Sverdlovsk region. The former were allegedly accused of embezzling budgetary funds, and the latter reported that they had invested them in an investment company. "Thus, the attention of law enforcers was drawn to the company QBF. They took it under investigation, conducted searches. They are trying to pressure in order to obtain funds in an amount the company has never had. We are talking about several billion rubles," said Nikolai Stepanov, a spokesman for QBF, to Kommersant, "In the course of the investigation the company's equipment was damaged. The company's technical support should be fully restored by Monday, May 31. Funds transfers, transactions and settlements will be executed within the time limits specified in the regulations and contracts. The accounts of the company and the clients are functioning, there are no failures in the financial activity of the company".

Recall that just a month ago, police officers shut down a similar investment site, Shumakov & Partners LLC, in the neighboring Empire Tower in Moscow City. Its cofounders George Gats and Denis Shumakov are currently under arrest for similar manipulations. And the latter, before opening his own business in 2016, was a senior financial advisor to the same company QBF.