

# Russian American lobbyist was present at Trump Jr.'s meeting with Kremlin-connected lawyer

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By **Tom Hamburger** and **Rosalind S. Helderman** July 14 at 1:05 PM

A Russian American lobbyist, who served in the Russian military in the past, said Friday that he was in the room for a June 2016 meeting between President Trump's oldest son and a Kremlin-connected attorney.

The presence of Rinat Akhmetshin, adds to the number of people in attendance at the Trump Tower gathering that emerged this week as the clearest evidence so far of interactions between Trump campaign officials and Russia.

In an interview with the Washington Post, Akhmetshin said he participated in the session with several others. His role in the meeting was first reported by NBC News and the Associated Press.

Akhmetshin, a U.S. citizen, was lobbying at the time against U.S. sanctions imposed on Russia for human rights violations.

A lawyer for Donald Trump Jr., could not confirm Rinat's attendance but said there was an additional participant, whom he declined to identify.

That brings the total number of people who accompanied Russian attorney Natalia Veselnitskaya to the Trump Tower meeting to three.

In the interview, Akhmetshin said he did not know how the Trump Tower meeting was set up. He said he had lunch with Veselnitskaya that day and she asked his advice on what to say at the session.

"She said, 'Why don't you come with me?' I said, 'really?' We were having lunch a few blocks north of Trump Tower."

He said that "as part of her work, with her clients" Veselnitskaya had found that an American hedge fund was violating Russian tax and securities law and that the fund "seemed linked to the [Democratic National Committee]" He said that

Veselnitskaya “left a document behind” after the session.

Donald Trump Jr., has waved away concerns about the 30-minute session, which he agreed to because he was promised negative information about his father’s political opponent, Hillary Clinton. He was joined at the meeting by Donald Trump’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner and Paul Manafort, then chairman of the Trump campaign.

Trump Jr. has said that he did not receive the negative information on Clinton that he was promised by an acquaintance, Rob Goldstone, and that he did not know the people with whom he was meeting.

Goldstone, a British music publicist, told the Washington Post Friday that he had never met Veselnitskaya or her companions prior to the meeting and is not certain of their identities.

“I honestly paid no attention to any of them or their names — my job was to make sure they found the right security desk and signed in and found the elevator,” he wrote.

He referred all other questions to his attorney, Robert Gage, who did not return messages.

A spokesman for Manafort, Jason Maloni, declined to comment. A Kushner spokesman did not respond to requests for comment. In interviews this week, Veselnitskaya said Kushner and Manafort did not seem interested in the conversation and she insisted she was not representing the Kremlin at the session.

She and Akhmetshin were working at the time defending a Russian businessman from federal charges of money laundering in a suit that was settled early this year.

Akhmetshin was born in Russia, served in the Russian military and has told people he was trained by Russian intelligence agencies. He denied that he ever worked as an intelligence agent though he did confirm that he served in a counterintelligence unit of the Soviet military.

He told the Washington Post that he became a U.S. citizen in 2009 and is also still a Russian citizen.

“I never worked for the Russian government. I served as a soldier, for two years, like tens of millions of Russian young men who were drafted. I am proud of my military service. At no time have I ever worked for Russian government or any of its agencies. I was not an intelligence officer. Never,” he said.

According to AP, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that the Kremlin knows nothing about Akhmetshin.

Akhmetshin’s participation raises the level of the concern about the meeting. The top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee said he was disturbed by the news.

“Today’s report that a former Russian counterintelligence officer was also present during the meeting with Donald Trump, Jr., Jared Kushner and Paul Manafort, if accurate, adds another deeply disturbing fact about this secret meeting,” Rep. Adam B. Schiff (D-Calif.) said in a statement.

“Donald Trump, Jr.’s denial of any such meetings, his misleading initial representation that it dealt only with adoptions — a statement evidently approved by the White House — and his later admission that the whole purpose of taking the meeting was to receive the support of the Russian government in the form of damaging information about Hillary Clinton paint a portrait of consistent dissembling and deceit when it comes to the campaign’s meetings with Russian officials and intermediaries. “

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