

Lawyers, accountants, estate agents and PR professionals...

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I offer this from today's [Russia Report](#) from the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament:

49. Whilst the Russian elite have developed ties with a number of countries in recent years, it would appear that the UK has been viewed as a particularly favourable destination for Russian oligarchs and their money. It is widely recognised that the key to London's appeal was the exploitation of the UK's investor visa scheme, introduced in 1994, followed by the promotion of a light and limited touch to regulation, with London's strong capital and housing markets offering sound investment opportunities. The UK's rule of law and judicial system were also seen as a draw. The UK welcomed Russian money, and few questions — if any — were asked about the provenance of this considerable wealth. It appears that the UK Government at the time held the belief (more perhaps in hope than expectation) that developing links with major Russian companies would promote good governance by encouraging ethical and transparent practices, and the adoption of a law-based commercial environment.

50. What is now clear is that it was in fact counter-productive, in that it offered ideal mechanisms by which illicit finance could be recycled through what has been referred to as the London 'laundromat'. The money was also invested in extending patronage and building influence across a wide sphere of the British establishment — PR firms, charities, political interests, academia and cultural institutions were all willing beneficiaries of Russian money, contributing to a 'reputation laundering' process. In brief, Russian influence in the UK is 'the new normal', and there are a lot of Russians with very close links to Putin who are well integrated into the UK business and social scene, and accepted because of their wealth. This level of integration — in 'Londongrad' in particular — means that any measures now being taken by the Government are not preventative but rather constitute damage limitation.

*51. It is not just the oligarchs either: the arrival of Russian money resulted in a growth industry of enablers — individuals and organisations who manage and lobby for the Russian elite in the UK. **Lawyers, accountants, estate agents and PR professionals have played a role, wittingly or unwittingly, in the extension of***

Russian influence which is often linked to promoting the nefarious interests of the Russian state. A large private security industry has developed in the UK to service the needs of the Russian elite, in which British companies protect the oligarchs and their families, seek kompromat⁵⁶ on competitors, and on occasion help launder money through offshore shell companies and fabricate 'due diligence' reports, while lawyers provide litigation support. William Browder told the Committee that:

"Russian state interests, working in conjunction with and through criminal private interests, set up a 'buffer' of Westerners who become de facto Russian state agents, many unwittingly, but others with a reason to know exactly what they are doing and for whom. As a result, UK actors have to deal with Russian criminal interests masked as state interests, and Russian state interests masked by their Western agents."

I only added the emphasis. Do I need to say more?