

NEW JERSEY

Mueller report reveals how a Tenafly boy turned Russian pop star got involved with Trump

Svetlana Shkolnikova NorthJersey

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Before he helped broker a 2016 meeting between the Trump campaign and a Russian attorney offering derogatory information about Hillary Clinton, Emin Agalarov, the Russian-Azerbaijani pop star who spent his teenage years in Tenafly, toured a potential development site in Moscow with Ivanka Trump.

In February 2014, Agalarov and President Donald Trump's eldest daughter visited "Crocus City," a site owned by Agalarov's developer father Aras Agalarov, to explore a proposed joint venture to build an 800-unit building on the property, according to special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential election.

Mueller's 400-page report on the investigation sheds light on the relationship between the Agalarovs and the Trumps, detailing how the Agalarovs tried to woo the president after hosting Trump's Miss Universe pageant at Crocus City Hall in 2013.

Agalarov performed at the event and began discussing a Moscow-based real estate project with the Trump Organization shortly after.

Donald Trump Jr., the president's eldest child, served as the primary negotiator on behalf of the Trump Organization while Agalarov and Irakli "Ike" Kaveladze, a Georgian émigré who listed a business address in Englewood Cliffs, represented Aras Agalarov's Crocus Group real estate conglomerate, according to the report.

Moscow development plans

Kaveladze and Trump Jr. signed a preliminary agreement for a Trump Tower Moscow project in December 2013, according to the report. From January 2014 to November 2014, the Trump Organization Group discussed development plans for the project but by September 2014, interest from the organization appeared to be waning. Communication between the two parties grew infrequent and ceased by the end of November, according to the report.

The Agalarovs began reaching out to Trump again in 2016, exchanging gifts and letters as Trump began his campaign for the presidency. In written responses to the special prosecutor's questions, Trump wrote that Emin and Aras Agalarov arranged to have a painting delivered to Trump Tower as a birthday present.

The younger Agalarov became instrumental in setting up a meeting between senior representatives of the Trump campaign and Natalia Veselnitskaya, a Russian attorney, several months later. The meeting was proposed to Trump Jr. in an email from Robert Gladstone, a publicist for Agalarov. Agalarov and Trump Jr. had multiple brief phone calls to discuss the proposal, according to the report.

Both Gladstone and Kaveladze were surprised to learn that Trump Jr., Paul Manafort and Jared Kushner would likely attend the meeting.

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When Kaveladze, who was asked to attend as a translator, questioned one of Agalarov's assistants, Roman Benjaminov, about the purpose of the meeting, he was told it was for Veselnitskaya to convey "negative information on Hillary Clinton," according to the report.

Benjaminov graduated with Agalarov from Tenafly High School in 1997 and ran a company, RJI Properties, from the Palestroni building at 333 Sylvan Ave. in Englewood Cliffs. He told investigators that he did not recall telling Kaveladze that information, according to the report.

Kaveladze later reported to Aras Agalarov that the meeting had gone well but efforts to discuss the Magnitsky Act, a 2012 statute that imposed financial and travel sanctions on Russian officials and resulted in a retaliatory ban on adoptions of Russian children, were a waste of time because they were “preaching to the wrong crowd,” according to the report.

A year later, Goldstone emailed Agalarov to tell him attorneys from the Trump Organization had interviewed him about the meeting and were “concerned because it links Don Jr. to officials from Russia—which he has always denied meeting,” according to the report.

When the meeting became public in July 2017, Goldstone sent a text message to Agalarov saying he was trying to keep him and his father out of the story and if contacted: “I can do a dance and keep you out of it,” according to the report.

“FBI now investigating,” Goldstone added. “I hope this favor was worth for your dad – it could blow up.”

Agalarov complained to Kaveladze several days later that his father “never listens” to him and that their relationship with “**mr T** has been thrown down the drain,” referring to Trump.

As media attention swirled around those involved in the meeting, Goldstone told Agalarov that his reputation was destroyed “by this dumb meeting which your father insisted on even though Ike and Me told him would be bad news and not to do.

“I am not able to respond out of courtesy to you and your father,” Goldstone continued. “So am painted as some mysterious link to Putin.”

In the spotlight

The burgeoning scandal put Agalarov in a spotlight he had been chasing since high school.

As a teenager in Tenafly, Agalarov cultivated an air of celebrity as he zoomed around town in a customized black Myrons moped blasting music by Elvis Presley. Agalarov did not flaunt his wealth but it showed in his moped and the flashy, high-end leather jacket he would wear even over sweats, Dave Maresca, a high school friend, told NorthJersey.com after the meeting became public.

“He had this movie star vibe,” Maresca said. “He kind of already had that, 'I'm just waiting for the moment when my greatness is acknowledged' attitude. That's kind of how he carried himself.”

Agalarov spent his teenage years in a modest split-level home on East Clinton Avenue but later purchased a much more luxurious home in Demarest. The \$3 million mansion was put up for sale in 2017. Aras Agalarov purchased an \$8 million, 10-bathroom, seven-bedroom French manor estate in nearby Alpine in 2006 and sold it in 2017.

Both Agalarovs listed a business address at the Palestroni building in Englewood Cliffs.

A year after news broke of the Trump Tower meeting, Agalarov channeled the scandal into art.

In a June 2018 music video for his song “Got Me Good,” Agalarov poked fun at his claim to fame by surrounding himself with lookalikes of the Trump family and Hillary Clinton.

The video is largely set in a hotel, where a Trump look-alike is seen cavorting with scantily-clad beauty pageant winners — an apparent reference to a salacious dossier by the former British spy Christopher Steele.

“I wish you at least could be honest, I wish that you told me the truth,” Agalarov sings, with his hand on the Trump lookalike’s shoulder.

Email: shkolnikova@northjersey.com