

# RINAT AHKMETSHIN: “NOTHING IS SECRET.”

The Financial Times, which had the scoop that Rinat Ahkmetshin – the naturalized Russian lobbyist who attended the June 9, 2016 meeting in Trump Tower – appeared before Robert Mueller’s grand jury several weeks ago, has a long interview with him. The key, buried details are that he’s not all that interested in whether Russia tampered with the election.

I ask whether he thinks Russia intervened in the US elections. “They might have done,” he says, but doesn’t seem particularly fussed if they did. “It’s like someone steals your toothpaste from you because you couldn’t hide it well enough – I think there’s something honest about that.” He goes on to expound a curious theory of “personal responsibility” – the value he says he likes best about America.

Followed by the kicker line:

“Nothing is secret,” he had said. “If you’re not stupid, you should operate on that assumption.”

Along the way, though, the interview doesn’t answer two worthy questions. The piece reveals that Ahkmetshin bumped his rates up from \$450 to \$600 an hour this year, but it doesn’t explain whether and if so who paid for his time at Trump Tower last year. Sure, it’s only about \$450, but who paid it?

More importantly, it doesn’t address the question I asked here: given Ahkmetshin’s ties and past work for Fusion GPS, why did the intelligence company ask Christopher Steele to work on an anti-Trump dossier rather than Ahkmetshin himself? Given his ties, did he know about it?

The interview describes Akhmetshin's claim that he doesn't work for Russia, but would never do anything to hurt it.

I will never f\*\*k with Russian state," he says in idiosyncratic English spoken with a light Russian accent. "I will never do things against Russian government. It's stupid," he tells me. "Simply, the stakes are too high."

It describes his claim to be close with people at the CIA (which is why, he explains, Russia no longer trusts him). Akhmetshin also claims to have ties to French, British, and German intelligence. But he does go out drinking with Russian spooks when he's in Moscow.

The most remarkable passage in the interview (especially given the revelation that Paul Manafort's notes from the meeting suggest donations to Republicans were raised as well) however, is Akhmetshin's admission that, while he hadn't read the English language documents Natalia Veselnitskaya brought to the Trump Tower meeting, he had read the Russian versions.

Akhmetshin said he did not read the papers about Hillary Clinton's campaign funding that Veselnitskaya took to the meeting, but he had seen the Russian version of it before. He says the lawyer developed it with the help of private corporate intelligence and that it was about "how bad money ended up in Manhattan and that money was put into supporting political campaigns".

I find this revealing for several reasons. Remember that the early reports in the Steele dossier discuss pre-hacked email kompromat on Hillary Clinton. But why would a private intelligence company do a report in Russian, unless it was in Russia? Moreover, again, it seems Akhmetshin was already swimming in some of this Russian-based kompromat. So why didn't

Fusion have him collect on Trump? Did he work on the earlier, pre-June research paid by a Republican?

In short, the questions for Akhmetshin should go beyond the Trump Tower meeting, because there are obvious questions about his relationship with Fusion GPS.