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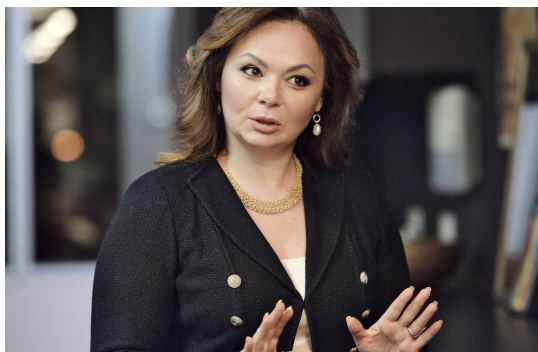
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U.S.

Emails Shed Light on Trump Tower Meeting

Russian lawyer has said she didn't have damaging information about Hillary Clinton



Lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya has said she didn't have damaging information about Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. PHOTO: KOMMERSANT PHOTO/ASSOCIATED PRESS

By Rebecca Ballhaus

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Newly disclosed emails shed light on the period leading up to a June 2016 meeting at Trump Tower between a Russian lawyer linked to the Kremlin and top campaign aides to President Donald Trump.

The new information appears to bolster lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya's position that she wanted the meeting to argue her case for overturning the Magnitsky Act, a U.S. law targeting Russian human-rights abuses. Ms. Veselnitskaya has previously said the meeting wasn't organized to provide damaging information about Mr. Trump's Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton.

The meeting became a flashpoint of controversy this summer when Mr. Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., released emails showing that he had been told the purpose of the meeting was for the Russian government to provide allegedly incriminating information about Mrs. Clinton.

Scott Balber, a lawyer for the Azerbaijani-Russian billionaire Aras Agalarov, provided emails Monday from the period leading up to the meeting, which Mr. Agalarov helped arrange for Ms. Veselnitskaya. In an interview, he also offered more information that, along with the emails, supported Ms. Veselnitskaya's account that the meeting wasn't about Mrs. Clinton.

Ms. Veselnitskaya has waged a yearslong campaign against the Magnitsky Act. As part of that effort, she routinely reached out to Russian authorities, she said earlier this year. She didn't respond to a request to comment Monday.

In October 2015, Ms. Veselnitskaya shared information about her anti-Magnitsky campaign with Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika, a top official appointed by the Kremlin, Mr. Balber said. In May 2016, less than two weeks before the June 9 Trump Tower meeting, Ms. Veselnitskaya also provided Mr. Agalarov with a five-page set of talking points that included the same information she had given Mr. Chaika, Mr. Balber said.

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Included in the information she shared with the men, Mr. Balber said Monday, was a single reference to Mrs. Clinton. Ms. Veselnitskaya alleged that a U.S. firm, Ziff Brothers Investments, had dodged taxes in Russia and later donated to Democrats, including possibly Mrs. Clinton.

Mr. Chaika's office released a statement in spring 2016 alleging Ziff Brothers Investments of evading taxes in Russia. The company hasn't been charged and has previously declined to comment on the allegations.

According to Donald Trump Jr., the meeting proved disappointing. In July of this year, after reports of the meeting first emerged, he said that Ms. Veselnitskaya "stated that she had information that individuals connected to Russia were funding the Democratic National Committee and supporting Clinton," but "It quickly became clear that she had no meaningful information." When Ms. Veselnitskaya then raised the issue of the Magnitsky Act, Donald Trump Jr. said he cut off the meeting.

The meeting is now being probed by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who is investigating whether associates of Mr. Trump colluded with Moscow as part of his probe into Russia's alleged interference in the 2016 U.S. election, according to people familiar with the matter.

The younger Mr. Trump spoke to Senate Judiciary Committee staff earlier this year. President Trump has denied his campaign colluded with Moscow, and Russia has denied meddling in the U.S. election.

On June 3, 2016—less than a week before the meeting took place—British publicist Rob Goldstone, who was working for Mr. Agalarov, wrote to the younger Mr. Trump to say that Russia's "crown prosecutor" was offering "to provide the Trump campaign with some official documents and information that would incriminate Hillary and her dealings with Russia and would be very useful to your father."

The "crown prosecutor" was believed to be a reference to Mr. Chaika, the Russian prosecutor general.

Mr. Balber said on Monday that Mr. Goldstone had "gotten it backwards"—that Ms. Veselnitskaya had provided information to Mr. Chaika, rather than the other way around. Mr. Goldstone's attorney declined to comment.

In July 2017, asked whether Mr. Chaika had a role in arranging Ms. Veselnitskaya's meeting in Trump Tower, the Russian prosecutor general's office said it "does not exchange information and does not conduct any meetings at the international level outside the framework regulated by international legal agreements and Russian procedural legislation."

In a newly disclosed email from the morning of the meeting, Ms. Veselnitskaya also referenced her campaign against the Magnitsky Act.

In an email to Mr. Goldstone, Ms. Veselnitskaya asked to bring lobbyist Rinat Akhmetshin to the meeting, saying he was "working to advance these issues with several congressmen." Mr. Akhmetshin is a Russian-born lobbyist who has worked to overturn the Magnitsky Act.

Write to Rebecca Ballhaus at Rebecca.Ballhaus@wsj.com

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