

Libor Novák

Czech politician accused of corruption

Novák's name became synonymous with corruption after he was implicated in a scandal involving donations to his political party, the Civic Democrats. The affair brought down the Czech government in 1998.

Novak served as deputy chairman of the party and had been responsible for handling its finances. He resigned from his position, but was arrested and tried for tax evasion in connection with the case. He was found not guilty.

In Dubai, Novak is listed as owning **six apartments** in the Dubai Marina worth **nearly \$2.7 million**. He could not be reached for comment.

Ivo Rittig and Lenka Rittig

Politically-connected Czech businessman and his wife

Before the fall of Communism, Ivo Rittig was convicted for stealing money from a state grocery store, where he worked as a manager. He was sentenced to nine years in prison.

Rittig formerly had a significant influence on Czech politics. But he has been linked to many corruption scandals, including suspicious contracts with a Prague transport company. In 2021, he was cleared of all charges.

He and his wife Lenka are listed as owning **three apartments** in Dubai worth **nearly \$1.7 million**. OCCRP was only able to contact the Rittigs over Instagram. They did not answer the journalist's questions. Instead, Ivo Rittig published a post on his account mocking the questions.

Jan Kočka

Czech businessman and politician accused of tax evasion and violent crime

In May 2017, Kočka was charged with participating in a criminal group that evaded paying over \$620,000 in taxes. The case is ongoing. In July 2021, he was detained on charges of extortion and violent crime.

In Dubai, Kočka and his wife Kateryina Faberova are listed as owning **three apartments** worth **over \$660,000**. Kočka did not respond to a request for comment.

Marko Taylor

Estonian businessman convicted of fraud

Taylor worked for the Research Triangle Institute, a company that distributed millions of dollars of U.S. government funds for the rebuilding of Iraq.

Under a previous name, Marko Rudi, he was accused by U.S. authorities of receiving kickbacks from a Dubai subcontractor. In 2010, he reached a plea deal with the government, admitting that he had committed major fraud. After serving his 33-month prison sentence, Rudi changed his surname to Taylor and moved to Dubai.

He is listed as owning **a villa and an apartment** worth **over \$1 million** in the emirate. He bought the first property in 2013. Reached by reporters, Taylor denied that he had engaged in fraud, but said he needed to make a plea deal because he had been unable to prove his innocence.

Irena Krasteva

Bulgarian media mogul and mother of sanctioned oligarch Delyan Peevski

Krasteva once owned six of Bulgaria's largest newspapers and a major television channel. In 2015, she transferred ownership of the newspapers to her son, well-known oligarch Delyan Peevski, who sold them off in 2021.

Besides his business activities, Peevski is also a member of the Bulgarian National Assembly, a position he has held almost continuously since 2009. In 2021, he and six companies owned or controlled by him were sanctioned by the United States for his "role in public corruption," including influence peddling and bribery.

In Dubai, his mother Krasteva is listed as owning a **villa** worth **about \$570,000**. She could not be reached for comment.

Veliko Zhelev

Bulgarian businessman accused of procurement heist

Formerly the deputy chief of the Bulgarian Road Agency, Zhelev then became the most prominent businessman in the road construction industry. His company Hydrostroy has won public procurement contracts worth millions of euros. In a TV interview, Bulgaria's interior minister accused Zhelev of involvement in a multi-million-euro public procurement heist, mentioning that \$11.3 million were "transferred to the UAE."

In Dubai, Zhelev is listed as the owner of **nine apartments** in the Liv Residence on the Dubai Marina and **another apartment** in the Serenia Residences on Palm Jumeirah. Together, these properties are worth **over \$4 million**. Reporters reached out to Zhelev through his company Hydrostroy and also attempted to call him, but did not receive a response.

Bilyana Bobi Stoyanova

Sister of Bulgarian deputy prosecutor general with questionable family wealth

Stoyanova's brother, Bulgarian deputy prosecutor general Borislav Sarafov, has long been suspected of possessing unexplained wealth. An investigation by OCCRP partner Bivol showed that his young son acquired two luxury flats in Sofia. Sarafov's declared income cannot account for these purchases.

Stoyanova does not own any business in Bulgaria. In Dubai, she is listed as owning **an apartment** worth **about \$405,000**. She could not be reached for comment.

Cosmin Codrin

Romanian businessman convicted of soliciting sex from underage sex trafficking victims

In 2018, Codrin received an eight-month suspended sentence and 70 days of community service for soliciting sex from high-school-aged victims of sex trafficking. The court found that the girls had been forced into the work by a criminal group including a judge, a policeman, a doctor, a lawyer, and several businessmen.

In Dubai, Codrin is listed as owning **four apartments** worth **nearly \$760,000**.

Contacted by reporters, he said that he purchased the apartments using income from his companies. He also denied his guilt in the sex trafficking case. "I was included because I didn't want to testify against people I didn't know," he said.

Roxana Elisabeta Sfrija

Romanian businesswoman investigated for tax evasion

Sfrija is being investigated in a tax evasion and money laundering case which focuses on the now-defunct television channel Realitatea, formerly owned by businessman Sorin Ovidiu Vantu. When Vantu faced legal trouble, the channel was transferred between several entities. Prosecutors allege that these transfers violated the law. As the investigation is ongoing, Sfrija's exact role is unclear.

Sfrija co-owned a building in Bucharest with several people, including two former officials now in prison for corruption.

In Dubai, she and her former husband are listed as owning an **apartment** and a **villa** worth **nearly \$940,000**.

Contacted by email, Sfrija didn't respond. Her former husband, Cătălin Sfrija, wrote that reporters' information was "incorrect" and that his ex-wife had provided the necessary information to authorities.

Edit Eva Mikula

Romanian ex-girlfriend of Italian mobster Fabio Savi

Together with his brothers, Savi founded the White Uno Gang, a criminal organization that carried out a series of armed robberies and killings in central Italy in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Arrested in 1994, his girlfriend Mikula collaborated with prosecutors and agreed to denounce the gang. Savi is currently serving a life sentence.

In Dubai, Mikula is listed as owning **two apartments** worth **over \$880,000**.

Reached by reporters, Mikula declined to answer questions about her Dubai real estate, but described herself as a "successful woman" and said that her life no longer has "anything to do with White Uno."

Codruta-Dana Bogatu

Wife of Romanian official convicted of corruption

Bogatu's husband, Eugen Bogatu, has worked as a customs officer and as a senior ports official in the city of Constanta. He was sentenced to 2.5 years in prison for his role in a corrupt VAT refund scheme.

He was also accused of being a member of a criminal group that collected bribes for customs processing, but was acquitted of those charges.

In Dubai, his wife Codruta Dana Bogatu is listed as owning an **apartment** worth **over \$510,000**. She declined to respond to reporters' questions.

Florin Paul

Romanian doctor and army general with undeclared apartment

Paul is known for his close relationship with Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă. In 2020, when Ciucă was defense minister, Paul was appointed his advisor and served in this position for 10 months.

In Dubai, Paul and his wife are listed as owning an **apartment** worth **about \$130,000**. He did not include this apartment in his mandatory asset declaration as a state official, a violation of the law.

Reached by reporters by phone, Paul said he did not remember whether he had declared the apartment. "It was bought with our money, and that's it," he said.

Sebastian Popa

Romanian businessman convicted of fraud

In 2016, Popa was convicted of falsifying land purchase contracts to convince a German company to give him a loan, but managed to flee the country to avoid prison.

After an international arrest warrant was issued, he was detained in Abu Dhabi the same year. Three years later he was extradited back to Romania, where he now faces additional charges of embezzlement and money laundering.

In Dubai, Popa is listed as owning **two apartments** worth **about \$510,000**. A law firm representing him declined to respond to reporters' questions, citing UAE privacy laws.

Sorin Stefan Cohut

Former Romanian border guard convicted of corruption

Cohut was briefly arrested in 2011 as part of an investigation into border police officers and customs officials who were taking bribes from cigarette smugglers. In 2016, he was convicted of taking bribes and joining a criminal gang and given a suspended three-year prison sentence.

In Dubai, Cohut is listed as owning **two apartments** worth **about \$215,000**. He did not respond to requests for comment.

Tamás Meszlényi

Hungarian businessman with large tax arrears

Meszlényi owes the equivalent of \$289,000 in taxes personally. Under a Bissau Guinean identity of "Tom M. Csurgo," he also managed two now-liquidated companies that owed another \$550,000. The Hungarian government is unable to claim the money because Meszlényi left the country years ago.

In Dubai, Meszlényi and his wife are listed as owning **two villas** and **five apartments** worth **over \$2.3 million**. They did not respond to a request for comment. "He's a grown-up," Meszlényi's mother told reporters.

Lucia Daniela Goreaev

Romanian politician with undeclared apartment

Goreaev is a former deputy director of the local branch of a government department dealing with measurement standards. She also owns a cosmetics company and ran for senate in 2020.

In her asset declaration filed during that campaign, Goreaev did not declare any Dubai property, though she is listed as owning an **apartment** worth **over \$145,000**. She did not reply to requests for comment.

Ileana Mihaela Burcea

Romanian businesswoman implicated in money laundering scheme

Moldovan journalists reported in 2020 that Burcea was the founder, administrator and owner of three separate offshore companies that laundered 40 million euros from Moldova to Cyprus and Dubai. The money reportedly came from public contracts won by a company controlled by Moldovan oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc.

In response to requests for comment, Burcea denied involvement in the scheme and said that she did not know Plahotniuc, though documents seen by reporters suggest otherwise.

Burcea is listed as owning a Dubai **villa** worth **over \$240,000**. She told reporters that she also has a second property in the emirate and is a resident. "It is natural to own a property in Dubai, because my business center is in Dubai and I live in Dubai," she said.

Radomir Vybiral

Czech businessman convicted of fraud

Vybiral was convicted of involvement in a massive VAT fraud scheme in the fuel trade that cost the Czech state roughly \$20 million. In 2014, he was sentenced to 13 years in prison.

In Dubai, Vybiral is listed as the owner of an **apartment** worth **\$785,000**.

Zdenek Blahut

Former Czech intelligence official charged with corruption

Blahut is the former deputy head of the Czech Foreign Intelligence Unit. In 2021, he was accused of masterminding the fictitious purchase of surveillance equipment that cost the agency over \$8 million. He denies the allegations, and the investigation is still ongoing.

In Dubai, Blahut is listed as the owner of an **apartment** worth **\$275,000**. When contacted by reporters for comment, he denied owning it.

Stephan Steinkeller

Italian charged with taking part in illegal cryptocurrency scheme

One of 14 people charged with fraud and illegal financial brokerage in relation to an alleged cryptocurrency ponzi scheme called OneCoin. Steinkeller's two brothers were also charged.

Steinkeller and the others are accused of recruiting people to invest in the scheme. Authorities concluded that 3,700 people from South Tyrol and Veneto regions, where the Italians operated, invested a total of 5 million euros in OneCoin.

Around the world, the scheme has cost its victims an estimated 1.8 billion euros. It was founded by Bulgarian citizen Ruja Ignatova in 2014. She has been convicted of fraud in Germany and charged in several other countries, but remains at large.

Though a native of the Italian town of Brixen, Steinkeller lived in Dubai at the time of his alleged participation in the scheme. He is listed as owning **two apartments** worth **over \$1.7 million**. He did not respond to requests for comment.