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Gennady Vdovichenko. Who paid for the villa near Nice and what is known about the hotel in Sofia

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Gennady Pavlovich Vdovichenko and the case concerning the Ukrainian Armed Forces' bulletproof vests. We are investigating the deal involving Villa Velvet near Nice, the purchase of the 'Paris' hotel and documents relating to arrests in France.



Editorial collage featuring a portrait of Gennady Vdovichenko provided by 'Slidstvo.Info'. The buildings in the background are for illustrative purposes only.

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There is a record of the sale of the property in the French property transactions database **11 May 2023 for €2,701,500**. The address matches the one under which the French register currently lists the company AZUR and its property, Villa Velvet, in Villeneuve-Loubet, near Nice. AZUR itself appeared in the register eight days later. There is another date in Sofia that needs correcting: in a Bulgarian court, Mimaltemer, the supplier of body armour to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, stated the date of purchase of the 'Paris' hotel building as **22 November 2022**. According to journalists, the flats in the Bulgarian capital were purchased as early as 2023.

The name linking the investigations into the procurement and the French property is — **Gennady Pavlovich Vdovichenko**, former head of the Ukrainian Armed Forces' Logistics Development Directorate. In autumn 2026, Eurojust and the SBU reported searches and the seizure of assets in France. The official reports do not include a list of addresses. We have cross-referenced them with Ukrainian court documents, French registration records and a Bulgarian court ruling to determine for which transactions the price and date are already known, and what further documents are needed to answer the question: who paid for them?

How 67,000 bulletproof vests ended up in a criminal case

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defence signed its first contract with the Bulgarian company Mimaltemer Ltd on 5 March 2022. VAKS ruling No. 118686266 refers to contract No. 01 for 30,000 sets. Each set comprised a vest, a soft ballistic panel and two plates. The case file contains a second contract, No. 03, dated 11 April. Court document No. 120252878 sets out the prosecution's position: under this contract, the military unit received 37,000 vests. Together, these 30,000 and 37,000 make up the same 67,000 reported by the SBU and Eurojust.

A distinctive feature of the deal is that it was paid for in full in advance. According to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), public funds for the body armour were transferred before delivery. Following delivery, an independent ballistic assessment established that the vests did not provide the stated level of protection. The failure of the tests relates to the intended use of the product: the batch that was formally accepted does not provide the soldier with the level of protection specified by the purchaser in the contract. In the materials submitted to the High Anti-Corruption Court, the investigation also highlighted how quality control procedures were carried out and how individual acceptance certificates were altered. These actions are described in the procedural document as the prosecution's version of events.

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The High Anti-Corruption Court's ruling of 4 July 2024 sets out a preliminary assessment of the damages as put forward by the prosecution — **1,724,852,735.10 UAH**. A November statement from the SBU refers to almost 2 billion hryvnias of public funds received as an advance payment. Eurojust puts the loss at over €53 million. Without expert calculations and an agreed date for the currency valuation, these figures cannot be declared to be exact equivalents. A separate breakdown from 'Slidstvo.Info': €86.5 million in total transfers by Mimaltemer, according to documents examined by journalists, including €78 million for bulletproof vests and €8.5 million for uniforms. This covers the payments identified in the journalistic investigation, which also takes other supplies into account.

In the documents, it is important to distinguish between the order quantity and the actual quantity accepted. The VAKS materials contain a supplementary agreement for a further 15,000 sets to the March contract. Meanwhile, the description of the second contract mentions 50,000 items ordered and 37,000 items accepted. The difference of 13,000 can be calculated simply by subtraction, but it is not possible to determine from a single figure exactly which deliveries Vdovichenko was referring to when he spoke of claims against the supplier. To do so, one needs the claims themselves, including batch numbers and a list of the inspection reports on which the Ministry of Defence raised objections.

In a written response to 'Sledstvo.Info', Vdovichenko contested the findings regarding quality and pointed to the discrepancy between the Ministry of Defence's claims against the supplier and the extent of the claims against former officials. Isa Merzhoev, the former owner of Mimaltemer, also insisted that the vests were of high quality. In its response to journalists, the Office of the Prosecutor General referred to the findings of expert assessments stating that the purchased items were unfit for their intended use. Test reports and batch numbers make it possible to verify the dispute: they show which samples were examined and to which consignments the conclusion applies.

The French villa. The sale took place eight days before AZUR was established

Two French sources allow us to verify part of the story independently of one another. In the public 'Demandes de valeurs foncières' database for 2023, there is entry No. 2023-66730. The property at Villa Velvet in Villeneuve-Loubet was recorded as the sale of commercial premises with an area of 375 m² for €2,701,500. The transaction date listed in the record is 11 May 2023. The national business register shows that the company AZUR, SIREN **953 505 468**, established on 19 May 2023. Villa Velvet is listed as its trade name, and its main activity is hotels and similar accommodation.

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The matching address provides a precise location for the property. The public record of the transaction does not disclose the buyer's name, whilst the company's registration details confirm its registration and place of business. One question remains between them, which is resolved by the notarial deed: in whose name was the purchase registered on 11 May, and in what capacity did this buyer act, given that the company subsequently refers to them? Payment documents would make it possible to verify separately whose funds were received by the notary. Based on publicly available data, it cannot be considered established that AZUR purchased the property on 11 May, or that Vdovichenko personally transferred the money for the villa.

The French corporate database Pappers lists Mimalt Merjou as president of AZUR. 'Slidstvo.Info' and BIRD, having examined French registration data, identified Yevheniia Vdovichenko, the daughter of a former officer, as a co-owner of the company. In the public Pappers profile, the list of ultimate beneficial owners is not publicly accessible. We cite the mention of co-ownership as the result of the journalists' investigation. Family and corporate ties explain the interest in the property; however, documents regarding the financing of the transaction are required separately.

€1.18 million into an account in France. How does the investigation describe this transfer?

In January 2025, 'Slidstvo.Info' published a specific sum taken from the materials of the Ukrainian case: **€1 180 000**. According to the investigation's version of events as set out in the court documents, part of the money received by Mimaltemer from the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence was transferred between 5 April and 12 May 2022 to the account of Vdovichenko's former wife at Crédit Agricole in France. Journalists linked the anonymised reference to the recipient in the court document with information from other open sources.

Vdovichenko told journalists that this transfer did not concern him and suggested they contact the people involved in the operation. He also stated that he had left Ukraine legally and was attending court hearings. Isa Merzhoev confirmed that he knew the family, reported that Vdovichenko had been involved in escorting consignments, whilst contesting the allegations relating to the deliveries. 'Sledstvo.Info' reported that it had been unable to obtain comments from Vdovichenko's ex-wife and his daughter.

In a statement dated 29 October 2026, Eurojust set out a version of events according to which the former head of the logistics department facilitated the conclusion of a contract and may have received a payment from the supplier. The investigation suggests that the funds were invested, via

a third party, in property in the Nice area. Eurojust does not name the official by name nor does it publish a statement of this transfer prior to the payment for the specific property. The next step in the investigation is to cross-reference the deposits made in 2022 with the source of funds for the sale in 2023.

What is known about the searches and arrests in France

Eurojust's public statement was issued on 29 October. On 13 November, the SBU reported that it had been working alongside the State Bureau of Investigation (DBR), the Office of the Prosecutor General and French law enforcement agencies in response to a request for international legal assistance. Documents, mobile phones and other devices were seized during the searches. In France, the suspects' property and bank accounts were frozen. Eurojust stated that the cooperation involved an investigating judge in Paris and the French unit for serious financial crimes.

The dates 29 October and 13 November are the dates on which the reports were published. The exact dates of the searches and the list of seized properties are not disclosed in these two press releases. Therefore, we were able to confirm, based on publicly available documents, that assets in France had been seized in general. To confirm that Villa Velvet and the two specific flats were included on the list, a copy of the French court order or clarification from the authority that carried out the seizure is required.

The 'Paris' Hotel in Sofia. What emerged in the Bulgarian court

According to a joint investigation by BIRD and 'Slidstvo.Info', Mimaltemer paid around **€1.7 million**. The year 2023 features in various accounts. Decision No. 10262 of the Supreme Administrative Court of Bulgaria, dated 19 October 2026, records that Mimaltemer itself, in its dispute with the city council, specified the date of purchase of this building as — **22 November 2022**. The court describes the four-storey hotel, acquired through a notarised transaction. In February 2024, Sofia City Council announced that it had granted a permit for the reconstruction and restoration of the façades of the 'Paris' Hotel, built to a design by Naum Torbov between 1909 and 1912.

A court document provides two further points for verification: Mimaltemer submitted contracts for construction work dated 8 April 2024 and 30 September 2025. It is not possible to determine from these documents whether the renovation was completed by November 2026. BIRD cited the

builders’ estimate of €5–6 million. This indicates the possible scale of the work, and whether such a sum was actually paid can be verified through cost estimates, invoices and payments to contractors. Separately, in March 2023, according to documents examined by journalists, the company purchased a 112 m² flat in Sofia for €350,000.

The Bulgarian proceedings had a specific subject matter — the municipal waste collection charge for 2023. The court of final appeal upheld the charge **42,885.76 leva** with interest. The ruling confirms the company’s involvement in the dispute as the owner of the property and helps to clarify the timeline. The court did not establish the source of the funds used for the purchase in this case.

In the Bulgarian company registration document with the EIK **206391274** Oksana Merzhu is listed as the sole owner and manager of Mimaltemer. The account history shows that on 19 May 2022, both management and ownership were transferred to her. Prior to that date, both roles were registered to Isa Merzhoev. Journalists attribute the purchase of the hotel to the company. We have not found any publicly available documents that would allow us to attribute ownership of the hotel, the renovation work or its financing to Gennady Vdovichenko personally. Nor is there any public confirmation of the hotel’s seizure in Bulgaria in the materials we have examined.

Chronology of court proceedings. Who is involved and which cases are ongoing

The VAKS rulings on the procurement specify the number **62023000000000883** and the date of entry in the register is 13 October 2023. According to information published by the Office of the Prosecutor General on 17 October 2024, the indictment concerning the procurement of substandard ammunition was referred to the High Anti-Corruption Court. Among the former officials whom specialist publications have linked to the case are Vdovichenko, former Deputy Minister of Defence Vyacheslav Shapovalov, and former head of the procurement department Bogdan Vladimirovich Khmelnitsky. In January 2025, “Slidstvo.Info” reported on a wanted notice for Vdovichenko on the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ website. We have been unable to confirm the current status of this notice.

In November 2026, the SBU stated that the case concerning the purchase itself was already being heard in court, whilst the investigation into money laundering was continuing. The investigative measures in France relate to establishing the origin of the assets. We found no verdict in the materials examined relating to this episode.

Five documents that trace the timeline

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Date	Document	What this confirms
5 March and 11 April 2022	Contracts No. 01 and No. 03 in the materials of the High Anti-Corruption Court	Two procurements, one of which involves the episode concerning the 67,000 sets received
22 November 2022	The date of purchase as stated by Mimaltemer in the Bulgarian court	The hotel is listed as having been acquired by the company in 2022
11 and 19 May 2023	The French DVF record and the AZUR card	The sale price was €2,701,500, and the company was incorporated on a separate date
17 October 2024	Statement from the Office of the Prosecutor General regarding the submission of the indictment	The procurement case moves to the court stage
29 October and 13 November 2026	Reports from Eurojust and the SBU	Searches and seizures of property and bank accounts in France



Dates and amounts from the French transaction database, the Bulgarian court ruling, and the investigation by BIRD and ‘Sledstvo.Info’.

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Who paid for the villa?

The French database provided the amount and date of the sale, whilst Ukrainian documents contain details of bank transfers currently being investigated. To establish a link between them, a notarial deed and a payment corresponding to this purchase are required. As for Bulgaria, the documents point unequivocally to Mimaltemer: the property description, the date of the transaction, the renovation permit and two contracts for the works are all known. It is now possible, with regard to the Bulgarian episode, to make a detailed comparison between the company's income and the specific dates of payments for the building and construction works.

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Use of materials

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Original publication

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