

The Godfather of the Russian Mafia in Brooklyn - who was Marat Balagula

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For BBC, New York

December 24, 2019



In New York, the former Odessa citizen Marat Yakovlevich Balagula died, having served three terms for a scam with debit cards and tax evasion and had a reputation as the "godfather of the Russian mafia", which was mainly created by my late colleague Robert Friedman, the author of the acclaimed "Red the mafia. "

The joker, who turned 76 on September 9, died of cancer. As one of his former bodyguards told me, "he gave up chemistry."

In the USSR, he ran a restaurant on the Ivan Franko ship - which Friedman stubbornly called Ivan Frenkel despite my protests - traveled around dozens of countries and was rich in the resale of things bought there.

Balagula emigrated to the United States from Odessa in 1977 and settled in Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, where he became co-owner of one of the first Russian restaurants - Sadko, and then Odessa, where Willy Tokarev sang for many years. He was accompanied by Irina Ola, who later became the fictitious wife of Vyacheslav Ivankov, nicknamed Yaponchik, and disappeared forever after his arrest in 1995 in the bowels of the witness protection program.

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Having sold Sadko in 1980, Balagula acquired a gas station in Queens, and then engaged in the wholesale of fuel, in which field he achieved remarkable success: as one prosecution witness showed during his trial, there was a period when Balagula controlled all trade in "left" gasoline in the Greater New York area, where up to 500 people worked for it. By "left" gasoline was meant fuel that was not taxed.

Tax evasion became a big criminal business in the USA in the 1980s, which cost the treasury of the US states literally billions of dollars. The leading role in it began to play Soviet emigrants who did not invent it, but put it on a new level. Their own bandits and Italian mafia clans "roofed".

Balagula, for example, was patronized by the famous clan Lukeze, whose killer Joseph Testa shot and killed in June 1986, at the Odessa restaurant, the former resident of Kiev, Vladimir Reznikov (Vadik Reznik), who was trying to extort gasoline from Balagula. Reznikov was the most productive "Russian" killer of that era and shot, among others, the writer and swindler Yury Brokhin and the first "godfather of the Russian mafia", a former Leningrad thief in law Yevsey Agron.

Balagula willingly admitted in an interview that his "business partners" had dealt with Reznikov after he complained to him, but claimed that he had no idea about the "partners" belonging to Cosa Nostra.



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On Brighton Beach, legends went about Balagula's wealth and adventures, which were later retold by criminal journalists. In one of our conversations, he told me that the doors in his house cost 10 thousand dollars. Six months later, Balagula said that he was just trolling me, and that in fact the doors cost \$ 500.

He was generally embarrassed and, for example, claimed in the same conversation that he had only \$ 8 in his account at that moment. But at the same time, he asked me to tell the journalist Friedman that he would pay him 100 thousand dollars if he showed him a photograph. portraying Mikhail Gorbachev along with the joker. The journalist claimed that Gorbachev was seen at Balagula's birthday, and told me that this was subject to the photograph he had. Balagula said that in Gorbachev's life he hadn't seen anything close.

The first time Balagula was arrested in 1985 was not for fraud with gasoline, but for a scam with debit cards, in which he played only a peripheral role. The following year, the Philadelphia jury found him guilty.

Without waiting for the verdict, Balagula, released on bail of half a million dollars, fled abroad and over the next two and a half years managed to visit many countries, including South Africa and Sierra Leone, where he had an unsuccessful diamond business with Shabtai Kalmanovich, who He was subsequently convicted in Israel for espionage in favor of the USSR. Balagula invariably spoke badly of Kalmanovich.



In 1989, Balagula, who later told me that he was just tired of running and was no longer hiding, was detained at the Frankfurt airport and extradited to the United States, where he was sentenced to eight years in prison for a scam with cards and twice attracted for "left" gasoline, for which he got 10 and then almost seven and a half years. In particular, he pleaded guilty to tax evasion of \$ 85 million.

In the late 1990s, when he called me from the Texas federal prison to the Odessa and Paradise restaurants, because their numbers were on the approved list, and mine was not, Balagula denied the guilt and said that he admitted only at the instigation the lawyer who misled him.

"I always paid taxes!" He said. "They didn't pay the companies I bought gas from." Indeed, taxes had to be paid by shell companies that were open to shell owners, whom well-read Soviet emigrants called "Pounds."

According to a widespread myth, Balagula led the Russian mafia after the murder in 1985 of a lawyer Eusebius Agron, although the deceased indignantly denied me belonging to the criminal world. My relationship with the Balagula began to deteriorate in May 1998, when I called in the Brooklyn newspaper the thug Boris Nayfeld, or Bib, his associate.

The joker had power in Brighton, which was explained to me by its wealth and proximity to the source of enrichment, that is, to "gasoline". About people who hunted by evading the excise tax on fuel, they said "he is a gasman" (less often a "columnist" from a gas station) or "he is in gasoline."

In the sunset period of Agron's life, the joker of the Balagula was much more influential than him and allocated him a room in his El Carib sports club. It was flattering to Balagula that he sheltered such a significant figure, but then he already possessed much more weight than Agron, who had been mutilated before this by a gangster bullet.

Friedman wrote that Agron made \$ 100 million a month, but the last life partner of Agron, singer Maya Rozova, who worked for the USSR in Oleg Lungstrem, told the author of these lines that only \$ 90 thousand remained from the "first godfather of the Russian mafia," hidden in a closet in a shoe box. The joker was immeasurably richer, although he assured me that in his life he did not have two supertankers or an island off the African coast, which journalists attributed to him.

"I'm not a beggar, I'm not a beggar!" He said. "But I'm not a multimillionaire, as they wrote! I have never had a million in my entire life. One! Do you understand or not?"

I understood. But I did not believe it.

We met Balagula when the king of gasoline spent ten years and was passionate about writing world history.

"Now I am writing to Nicholas the First," he said.

- And according to what sources?

- Encyclopedias, books. If I need some kind of book, I write an application, they give me it in Austin, in the capital of Texas, any book. And here the library is very large. Encyclopedia is. I have about 10 books on the history of Russia. I have a book completely about Peter the Great. There is a book entirely about Catherine the Second. "

If Balagula completed his encyclopedic work, his fate is unknown to me.

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