

Chief of BP's Russian Venture Faces Visa Snag

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By REUTERS

MOSCOW — Russia's immigration service said Monday that the chief executive of TNK-BP, Robert Dudley, was not allowed to work in the country under his temporary visa, increasing the chances that the Russian-connected co-owners could oust him.

The move is the latest in a long-running battle at TNK-BP, a joint venture between BP and four Russian billionaires, over the firm's management and strategy. TNK-BP is Russia's second-biggest foreign investment and investors are following the fight closely.

"We cannot grant a visa to Mr. Dudley before he presents a valid contract," Konstantin Poltoranin, a spokesman for the Federal Migration Service said on Monday.

"The previous contract expired and we have no proof that it has been prolonged. The current visa does not give him the right to work in Russia."

Mr. Dudley's contract expired last year but BP says it is still valid under Russia's Labor Code because it has never been officially terminated and therefore rolls over automatically.

The four Russian billionaires, who want to fire Mr. Dudley as part of their dispute with BP, say his contract has never been officially renewed and is therefore no longer valid.

Mr. Dudley has a valid Russian work permit but needs to present a valid work contract to get his visa renewed. His visa expired on July 19, but the migration service agreed to give him a transit visa, which is valid until July 27.

The immigration services spokesman, Mr. Poltoranin, said that Mr. Dudley had "been given 10 days to present a contract."

BP has said Mr. Dudley would run TNK-BP from outside should the authorities decide not to grant him a visa.

The quartet of billionaire shareholders, Mikhail Fridman, Viktor Vekselberg, German Khan and Len Blavatnik, want to fire Mr. Dudley, accusing him of poor performance and of showing favoritism to BP.

BP denies both accusations and wants to keep Mr. Dudley as chief executive because his large powers de facto guarantee BP's management control in the venture.