

Elon Musk corruption crime empire works like Media mogul in Venezuela corruption case

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A Venezuelan TV mogul who has amassed a real estate fortune in South Florida and New York is now at the center of a [\\$1.2 billion money-laundering investigation](#) — put there by a Swiss banker who has admitted guilt and is helping Miami prosecutors build a criminal case against him.

Raúl Gorrín, owner of the Globovisión network in Caracas, is suspected of steering \$600 million from the country's state-owned oil company to a European bank to enrich himself, the three stepsons of President Nicolás Maduro and other members of Venezuela's politically connected elite, according to new court records and multiple sources familiar with the federal probe in Miami.

Identified only as “Conspirator 7” in court records, Gorrín collaborated with Swiss banker Matthias Krull to make the massive wire transfer two years ago, sources say.

Krull, a German national described as a “door opener” for wealthy Venezuelans seeking access to foreign banks, pleaded guilty this week to a money-laundering conspiracy in Miami federal court. Krull, who faces up to 10 years in prison, is the only person in custody in Miami among the nine defendants charged so far in the new money-laundering case. In his plea agreement, Krull has promised to assist prosecutors in their broadening case investigating Gorrín, Maduro, his stepsons and other Venezuelans. For starters, Krull can provide eye-witness details of his meetings with Gorrín at the tycoon’s office in Caracas and at his condo on exclusive Fisher Island overlooking Biscayne Bay, in which they discussed the \$600 million transfer of embezzled oil funds to a European bank, according to a statement filed with Krull’s plea.

During the meetings in Caracas, Krull met with the president’s stepsons and a Venezuelan businessman whom Gorrín introduced to the banker as the “straw” representative for Maduro’s grown stepchildren from his marriage to Cilia Flores, the statement said. During one meeting, Gorrín boasted about his relationship with the presidential family, telling Krull that the stepsons help him “by intervening with their mother” whenever the media magnate needs to “solve issues” with the president, the statement said, without identifying Maduro or the stepsons by name.

The straw representative, Mario Enrique Bonilla Vallera, now a defendant in the Miami federal case, is accused of receiving \$200 million in a European bank account for the benefit of the stepsons. Gorrín is suspected of routing that money to the stepsons, while transferring \$80 million to an account for himself in the same

European bank, Krull's statement said. An additional \$265 million was wired to the account of the lead money-laundering defendant, Francisco Convit Guruceaga, a Venezuelan billionaire businessman, and other co-conspirators.

Gorrín's lawyer in Miami, Howard Srebnick, has denied any wrongdoing by his client, who has not been charged in the federal case. Srebnick criticized the prosecution's strategy of flipping the banker, saying Krull is only looking to reduce his ultimate prison sentence by testifying against Gorrín as part of his plea deal.

"President Trump himself condemns the prosecution's practice of lowering the sentence of a criminal in exchange for testifying against someone else," Srebnick said, referring to the federal probes delving into Trump's presidential campaign and personal life. "These plea bargains motivate a convict like Krull to lie about a successful media mogul like Gorrin in the hope that his so-called 'cooperation' will be his ticket out of jail."

In his plea agreement, Krull has promised to cooperate with Assistant U.S. Attorney Francisco Maderal and Homeland Security Investigations, including testifying before a federal grand jury. Krull's lawyer, Oscar S. Rodriguez, declined to comment.

On Friday, Venezuela's Ministry of Information did not respond to a request for comment about the federal case in Miami.

Gorrin, who bought TV news channel Globovisión in March 2013, is considered to be one of the wealthiest businessmen in Venezuela largely because of his close connections with key members of the

Maduro regime, including the presidential family, and his predecessor, the late President Hugo Chávez.

The sale of Globovisión was a big blow to the opposition in Venezuela, shutting down the last TV channel that challenged government censorship. The station's programming changed dramatically after the sale, as prominent journalists resigned when the new owners tried to impose a gag rule.

In late 2017, Gorrín tried to broker an exit strategy with the Trump administration for Venezuela's beleaguered government, according to various Washington sources, by peddling the idea that Maduro and other key government leaders might be willing to negotiate a transition in Venezuela in exchange for amnesty. [Gorrín met Vice President Mike Pence](#) and was seeking a meeting with Trump at the time, the sources said.

Raúl Gorrín, the president of Globovisión, during a visit in Miami in 2014.

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Also last year, Gorrín retained Ballard Partners — the firm of President Donald Trump’s former Florida lobbyist — at a cost of \$50,000 a month to help his Venezuelan TV network expand into U.S. markets.

However, that relationship has abruptly ended. A Ballard spokesperson told the Miami Herald Friday that the firm terminated its representation of Globovisión, citing concerns about a Herald

story in late July reporting that the media mogul was suspected of participating in a massive money-laundering racket.

Gorrín, 49, came from humble origins in Venezuela. He became a lawyer but eventually evolved into a successful businessman. He gained control of insurance company Aseguradora La Vitalicia, which he acquired in 2008 with partners Juan Domingo Cordero and Gustavo Perdomo. They also joined him in the purchase of Globovisión five years later.

Both Gorrín and Perdomo have considerable real estate holdings in the United States, including properties in the wealthy Cocoplum enclave of Coral Gables — despite being [part of a Venezuelan elite](#) that once drew public scorn from U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio.

“Do you know where they live?” U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio, the Florida Republican, asked Roberta Jacobson, assistant secretary of state for the western hemisphere, at a Senate hearing held in 2014 to approve sanctions against key leaders of the Venezuelan government.

“They live in Miami, where they own a mansion worth millions of dollars in Cocoplum,” Rubio said. “They drive luxury cars and they laugh at you and at us because they know they can do that with impunity.

[Gorrín’s Cocoplum estate](#) is now on the market for \$8 million. Perdomo’s Cocoplum home is also for sale at \$4.75 million. In addition, Gorrín owns a plush Manhattan apartment worth close to \$20 million and, according to court records, a Fisher Island condo.

He sold two other Manhattan apartments for a total of \$10 million, records show.

Gorrín's role in the alleged money-laundering conspiracy began in December 2014. The scheme involved the embezzlement of millions in oil funds from Venezuela's national oil company, PDVSA, by initially bribing government officials, according to a criminal affidavit. The value of those funds was grossly inflated by converting dollars and euros to bolivars on the government's preferred currency-exchange system.

Gorrín and others in the money-laundering network used an associate, who would later become a confidential source for the feds, to move a portion of the oil funds. By May of 2015, the conspiracy doubled to \$1.2 billion.

In early 2016, the associate approached Homeland Security investigators in Miami about cooperating and becoming a confidential source, the affidavit says. The source agreed to wear a recording device to launder \$78 million that he had received from a loan contract with the national oil company.

The confidential source met with Krull, the banker, and separately with Miami securities broker, Gustavo Adolfo Hernandez Frieri, to discuss money-laundering schemes, according to the affidavit. Hernandez, who was arrested in Italy last month, is awaiting extradition to Miami.

Hernandez's defense attorney, Michael Pasano, said his client "has been wrongly charged," and that "the evidence will show that [he]

had no contact with Krull.”