

Argentina Questions Head Banker in HSBC Tax-Dodge Scandal



Buenos Aires, April 01 (teleSUR-RHC) A special Argentine commission into tax evasion and capital flight will question two high-profile figures on Wednesday.

The questioning is part of a growing investigation into how thousands of people could have used Swiss bank accounts to undermine the Latin American nation's economy.

The Argentine Congress has formed a special bicameral commission into the alleged irregularities, and especially the role of the HSBC bank, accused by the government of facilitating not only capital flight, but also tax evasion.

In its first meeting on March 25, the commission agreed to call the head of the federal tax office, Ricardo Echegaray, and the president of the Argentine branch of the HSBC, Gabriel Martino, to testify at the next hearing on April 1st.

The commission is formed by 10 members of parliament from both the ruling party and the opposition. The president of the body, Roberto Feletti, from the governing Front for Victory coalition said that they had

called Echeagaray so he could provide the names of over 4,000 Argentine citizens and companies who hold secret accounts in the Swiss branch of HSBC. Feletti also pointed out that the commission will help “society to know what this bank did, whether it did so or not to facilitate the mechanism for capital flight.”

Luis Cicogna, another commission member, said that after investigating HSBC, “we will have to proceed with the investigation to see if other banks act in the same way.”

The origin of the accusation about the information of over 4,000 Argentine account holders with secret banking operations in Geneva was passed on to the Cristina Fernandez administration as a result of an agreement between the federal tax office AFIP with its peers in Switzerland and France. These countries had received information regarding money laundering and tax evasion from a former HSBC employee, Herve Falciani, who stored information from 100,000 account holders from around 200 countries and gave it to EU judiciary.

This has seen several countries including the USA, Belgium, France, Switzerland and Argentina press legal charges against HSBC. The most important Argentine account holders include the media giant Clarin Group, which is regarded as setting the agenda for the right-wing opposition to the Cristina Fernandez government.

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