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Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, former Vatican No. 2, denies financial wrongdoing

by Josephine McKenna by Religion News Service

Vatican City — The Italian cardinal who served as the Vatican's No. 2 official under Pope Benedict XVI has rejected allegations that he mishandled 15 million euros (\$20 million) from Vatican bank accounts.

The German daily *Bild Zeitung* reported Tuesday that Vatican regulators had opened an investigation into the allegations against former Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, citing unofficial church sources.

The newspaper said the money went to a TV production company, later identified as Lux Vide, that is owned by Bertone's friend Ettore Bernabei, a former director general of Italian state broadcaster Rai.

Bertone told the Italian news agency ANSA that there was "no problem linked to this operation" and that everything had been conducted according to "all the regulations" at the Vatican bank, officially known as the Institute for the Works of Religion.

The head of the Vatican press office, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, said Tuesday that there was "no criminal investigation" underway. That doesn't mean, however, that there aren't other probes underway.

Bertone, 79, who once headed a group of cardinals that oversaw the bank, told the Adnkronos news agency that the deal with Lux Vide had been approved Dec. 4.

Rene Bruehlhart, who heads the financial watchdog agency, has refused to confirm or deny the report. A spokesman for the Vatican bank also declined to comment on the report.

Bertone was appointed secretary of state by Pope Benedict XVI in 2006 and served until last year, when

Pope Francis replaced him with Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

During Bertone's term in office, the Vatican was rocked by mismanagement, especially the so-called "Vatileaks" scandal in which confidential church documents were leaked to the media by Benedict's butler in 2012.

Bertone was recently in the headlines again for renovating a lavish 6,500-foot residence next door to the pope's simple rooms at a Vatican guesthouse.

"I don't understand these attacks," Bertone told ANSA. "I am in harmony with the pope. ... He likes me."

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Francis shook up the administration of the scandal-plagued bank, replacing four members of the five-cardinal oversight committee. Bertone was among those ousted after less than a year of his five-year term.

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