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Gerashchenko Derides Yukos Charges in Court

By Alexandra Odynova

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Former Central Bank chief Viktor Gerashchenko testified at Mikhail Khodorkovsky's trial on Tuesday that the charges against the former Yukos CEO were ungrounded.

"I think that the allegation that the oil was stolen is inconsistent," Gerashchenko told Moscow's Khamovnichesky District Court, according to a transcript published on Khodorkovsky.ru.

Khodorkovsky and his business partner Platon Lebedev, who are serving an eight-year sentence on fraud and tax evasion charges, are in trial for related charges of stealing $30 billion in oil that could bring another 22 1/2 years in prison. Khodorkovsky's supporters say the case is politically motivated.

Prosecutors objected to the presence of Gerashchenko as irrelevant to the trial Tuesday, but the court denied their request that he be barred from testifying on behalf of Khodorkovsky.

Gerashchenko, who served as chairman of the Yukos board from 2004 to 2007, after Khodorkovsky's arrest in 2003, said he had never heard of oil theft in the company. He added that Rosneft, the state-owned oil company that acquired most of Yukos' assets at bankruptcy auctions, never reported any missing oil.

Before becoming Yukos' last chairman, Gerashchenko, 72, served two stints as chairman of the Central Bank, from 1992 to 1994 and 1998 to 2002.

Meanwhile, Sberbank CEO German Gref, who has been summoned by Khodorkovsky's lawyers, said Tuesday that he did not know whether he would testify because he had not received the summons. "I think that the summons was handed over to the bank, but I haven't seen it yet," Gref said, RIA-Novosti reported.

Last month, the court also agreed to a request by Khodorkovsky's lawyers to summon Industry and Trade Minister Viktor Khristenko to testify.

Former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov and Vedomosti editor-in-chief Tatyana Lysova testified last month.

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