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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Former Drug Official Pleads Guilty to Fraud

By Natalya Krainova

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A former senior Federal Drug Control official charged with fraud and abuse of office has pleaded guilty, and the Moscow City Court is set to sentence him Tuesday, Interfax reported.

Alexander Bulbov had repeatedly denied wrongdoing but apparently succumbed to "severe pressure" exercised on him and his family members by the authorities, one of his former lawyers said on condition of anonymity, Kommersant reported Monday. The lawyer did not elaborate.

The closed trial of Bulbov opened Monday and will be fast-tracked because the defendant pleaded guilty, court spokeswoman Anna Usachyova told Interfax.

Bulbov faced up to four years in prison on fraud charges and 10 years for abuse of authority, but he cannot get more than two-thirds of the maximum term because he pleaded guilty, the report said.

A request for comment left with the secretary of Sergei Antonov, Bulbov's lawyer, went unanswered Monday.

Bulbov was accused of illegally receiving 670,000 rubles ($21,300) in pension payments from the Federal Security Service between March 2003 and April 2010, Interfax said, adding that he has already returned the money.

He was also charged with illegally providing car passes granting immunity from traffic police to his acquaintances from 2004 to 2007.

Bulbov told Interfax before the start of the trial that he had resigned from the Federal Drug Control Service in early November.

Bulbov's case is widely seen as a rare glimpse into the secretive power feuds between the country's security agencies that erupted during the final months of Vladimir Putin’s presidency in late 2007.

Bulbov was first arrested in October 2007 on multiple charges, including the illegal wiretapping of several government officials. He was released from pretrial detention by the Supreme Court last year.

He said earlier that the case against him was fabricated by the Federal Security Service as revenge for his investigation into the Tri Kita furniture store, which was accused of smuggling goods through storage facilities owned by the Federal Security Service.

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