

Ex-Minister Jailed in Ukraine

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Former Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko talking with his wife Irina before the court session in Kiev.

Alexander Kosarev

A Ukrainian court on Monday ordered former Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko to be held in jail for two months as the Prosecutor General's Office investigates allegations of abuse of office.

"Lutsenko went out with his dog and turned around the corner to where there were no CCTV cameras," his People's Self-Defense party said in a statement.

"There, 11 masked SBU servicemen ... snatched him and took him away in a minivan," it said, referring to the country's main security service. Lutsenko's son ran after him and retrieved his phone and the dog before the former minister was taken away. Neither the SBU nor prosecutors could be immediately reached for comment.

Lutsenko said in a separate statement that neither he nor his lawyer was informed as to why he was detained. He has three days to challenge the decision.

"Lutsenko is charged with abuse of office and exceeding his authority and misappropriation

of state funds in large amounts,” Yuriy Boychenko, head of the Prosecutor General’s press service, said by phone. “He was informed of the charges on Dec. 13 and didn’t meet the investigator, so the investigator asked the court to replace the no-flee pledge with an arrest as the investigation continues.”

Igor Fomin, a lawyer for Lutsenko, said Monday that the case was not connected to earlier allegations that he overstepped his authority in paying his personal driver, Interfax reported.

Before the charges were brought, Lutsenko was told he should leave the country but refused because he wouldn't want to be "considered a coward," his wife, Irina Lutsenko, told a news conference, Interfax reported.

Lutsenko is the sixth member of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko’s Cabinet under investigation. Tymoshenko lost a presidential election to Viktor Yanukovich in a February election and the president has since cemented his grip on power, gaining the right to name the prime minister and Cabinet in October.

Tymoshenko has been under investigation since Dec. 15 for the alleged misuse of funds from the 2009 sale of emissions permits to Japan. The former prime minister, who was ordered to stay in Kiev during the probe, denied any wrongdoing and called the procedure “terror against the opposition.”

Prosecutors in August opened a criminal probe against former Economy Minister Bohdan Danylyshyn, saying he also misused funds. He was arrested two months ago in Prague, where he sought asylum. Former Environment Minister Heorhiy Filipchuk is being investigated, while former First Deputy Justice Minister Evhen Korniychuk and ex-Transport Minister Viktor Bondar were detained last week. The former Head of Ukraine’s State Treasury, Tetiana Sliuz, is on a wanted list.

Ihor Didenko, a former first deputy CEO at Naftogaz Ukrainy, was arrested this summer.

(Bloomberg, Reuters, MT)

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