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# Gref's Words Didn't Help Khodorkovsky

By Alexandra Odynova

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Mikhail Khodorkovsky standing in the defendants' cage before the start of a court session on Dec. 28. **Tatiana Makeyeva**

The Foreign Ministry accused the West on Tuesday of pressuring its courts over the trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev, as the judge dismissed testimony by a high-ranking official who spoke against the charges in the case.

Industry and Trade Minister Viktor Khristenko, who was deputy prime minister overseeing energy fields from 1999 to 2008, and Sberbank president German Gref, a former economic development minister, were defense witnesses in the second Yukos trial.

Khodorkovsky and Lebedev were convicted of stealing some 200 million tons of oil from subsidiaries of their own Yukos company.

Both Khristenko and Gref testified in Moscow's Khamovnichesky District Court in June that they doubted the embezzlement charges. They said it would have been impossible to steal that much oil unnoticed, and both said they had not been aware of any wrongdoing at Yukos.

And while defense lawyers hailed the testimony as backing their case, Judge Viktor Danilkin said Tuesday that Gref and Khristenko confirmed Khodorkovsky and Lebedev's guilt, the RAPSI news agency reported.

Danilkin found the men guilty Monday but has not finished reading the ruling. Vladimir Krasnov, a lawyer for Lebedev, told Gazeta.ru on Tuesday that he expected the reading — which is to culminate with the sentencing — to end before the New Year's holidays.

The United States and a number of European Union countries, including Germany, France and Britain, criticized the new convictions, drawing a sharp rebuke from the Foreign Ministry.

“Attempts to exert pressure on the court are unacceptable,” the ministry said in a statement. "We expect everyone to mind their own business — both at home and in the international arena."

The ministry also cited President Dmitry Medvedev's end-of-the-year television interview Friday, in which he said no officials should comment on the verdict before it is delivered.

Medvedev spoke days after Prime Minister Vladimir Putin explicitly said Khodorkovsky belonged in jail and compared him to U.S. schemer Bernard Madoff, who is serving a 150-year sentence for fraud.

Putin, widely believed to harbor a personal grudge against Khodorkovsky for his political ambitions, said later that he was referring to the first Yukos trial.

Khodorkovsky and Lebedev received eight-year jail sentences for fraud and tax evasion in 2005.

Vadim Klyuvgant, the lawyer leading Khodorkovsky's defense, said the ministry's statement was “full of lies,” Interfax reported. The defense has said it plans to appeal the convictions.

Only single-person pickets by Khodorkovsky's supporters took place by the courthouse Tuesday, but police still blocked the streets around the building after hundreds gathered the day before to rally in support of the defendants.

Meanwhile, Khodorkovsky and Lebedev called on their supporters to cheer up and wished them a happy New Year.

“Don't despair, our mutual efforts are not useless,” they said in a statement sent to The Moscow Times.

They also the judge acted harshly because he “feels ashamed, but is, alas, more scared than ashamed.”

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