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Czechs Grant Asylum to Former Ukrainian Minister

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PRAGUE — A former Ukrainian economics minister who has been charged with abuse of office was released from detention in the Czech Republic after he was granted asylum.

Czech prison service spokesman Robert Kacer said a state prosecutor ordered Bohdan Danylyshin's release on Friday, a day after he was granted political asylum.

Danylyshin was detained in Prague in October on an international arrest warrant issued by Ukraine.

Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Voloshin said Czech officials had yet to officially notify Kiev of the decision but the ruling made no sense.

Danylyshin "has never been engaged in politics in his life, so to talk even hypothetically about his political persecution is meaningless," Voloshin said, Interfax reported. "Danylyshin only started talking about being an alleged political refugee when he was arrested."

The Czech Interior Ministry, which granted asylum to Danylyshin, declined to explain its decision.

Danylyshin is wanted in the Ukraine on suspicion of causing 13.9 million hryvnas ($1.77 million) in damage to the state by failing to hire a cheaper contractor for Kiev's international airport.

After his release, Danylyshin said he and his lawyers considered the charges "politically motivated."

"There's no ground for the charges," he told Czech television. "What I did was in line with Ukraine's law."

Danylyshin is one of several allies of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko who have been investigated or detained since her rival, President Viktor Yanukovych, came to power last year.

Tymoshenko herself stands accused of using money from the sale of carbon credits under the Kyoto Protocol to pay pensions during a severe recession while serving as prime minister. She has denied the charges and called them a "witch hunt of the opposition."

Yanukovych's office declined to comment Friday.

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