

Two More Graft Cases Added to Oboronservis Case

July 23, 2013



Serdyukov at the May 9 Victory Day parade on Red Square. **Marina Lystseva**

Two more criminal cases have been opened as part of the wider Oboronservis investigation into the sale of state land at below market prices.

The Oboronservis case has been continuing for several months now, with new revelations of fraudulent land sales seemingly discovered every month. Though former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov was dismissed by President Vladimir Putin last November when reports of fraud and embezzlement first came to light, there have been few high-profile convictions for a case that investigators say cost the state budget 7.5 billion rubles (\$237 million).

Another figure in the case, Yevgenia Vasilyeva, a former head of the Defense Ministry property relations department, is under house arrest in connection with the case.

The latest cases, which bring the total number of criminal cases open in connection with the case to 12, concern "unidentified" employees from the Defense Ministry's property relations and procurement departments, Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin told

Interfax on Tuesday.

The cases relate to the sale of ministry property in the Moscow region and St. Petersburg at below-market prices.

Investigators are looking into the 2011 sale of a plot of state land that had been designated for housing construction.

The property department conducted the sale not through a regular tender process but through public offering, which allowed it to admit bids from only two commercial firms belonging to the same business group, investigators said.

As a result, one hectare of land located in the town of Balashikha near the capital was sold for 42.8 million rubles (\$1.32 million), far below market estimates, Markin said. The state lost over 50 million rubles in damages from that sale, he said.

The other case deals with the sale of a 17th-century building in St. Petersburg that was listed as a historical heritage site.

The building was placed under the ministry's control by the Federal Property Management Agency and was sold in 2011 for 376.5 million rubles to a Cyprus-based company set up just a few months before.

Experts believe that the property was worth 75.8 million rubles more than it was sold for, a source said. Several suspects, including Maxim Zakutailo, who headed a company linked to Oboronservis, and Konstantin Lapshin, deputy director general of the Slavyanka defense services holding company, were detained earlier in connection with the wider investigation into fraudulent land sales by Defense Ministry officials.

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