

57,000 Gems Seized From Indicted Former Defense Official

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Vasilyeva at a hearing in April. **Andrei Makhonin**

A haul of valuables including at least 57,000 precious stones have been seized from the former head of the Defense Ministry's property department, who was indicted Friday on 12 charges for her alleged role in the fraudulent sale of ministry properties, the Investigative Committee said.

The charges against Yevgenia Vasilyeva include fraud, money laundering, and exceeding and abusing her authority, committee spokesman Vladimir Markin said in a statement. If convicted on all charges, which she denies, Vasilyeva could be behind bars for more than two decades.

In what Markin said was part of an effort to compensate for losses incurred by the state as a result of Vasilyeva's alleged crimes, investigators seized various assets from her, including six pieces of real estate, a collection of rare watches and 19 kilograms of jewelry, among which

were 57,000 diamonds, rubies and emeralds. Markin said the estimated value of the jewelry and watches was more than 126 million rubles (\$3.9 million).

Vasilyeva served with former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov as director of Oboronservis, a company whose job was to sell off unrequired Defense Ministry property. Serdyukov was fired Nov. 6, 2012, shortly after the investigation into the fraudulent sales began, and Vasilyeva has been under house arrest since Nov. 13.

Six other people, including the general directors of several companies, have also been indicted, although the specifics of the charges have not been revealed.

Investigators believe that a collection of firms affiliated with Vasilyeva were created specifically for the embezzlement of money through the sale of government property at prices below their market value in exchange for bribes.

The loss to the government from her alleged activities was estimated at 3 billion rubles (\$93 million) by the Chief Military Investigative Department.

The investigation continues into more than 20 additional episodes of criminal activity, with suspects including a number of officials, among them senior ones, Markin said.

Serdyukov's lawyer told reporters Friday that his client had not and would not be charged. "He was and remains a witness," the lawyer said, legal news agency Rapsi reported.

Friday bore further bad news for Vasilyeva. Among the property that law enforcement officers confiscated last year from one of her luxury apartments was a series of paintings, presumed at the time to be highly valuable.

However, in an inspection following the seizure, art experts determined that "they do not have any kind of artistic value and, simply speaking, are cheap copies," Markin said.

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