

Former Deputy Agriculture Minister Released from Prison

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Former Deputy Agriculture Minister Alexei Bazhanov, the main suspect in the embezzlement case at state-owned company Rosagroleasing, has been released from prison, a news report said Tuesday.

In late December law enforcement authorities reduced the charges against Bazhanov and two more suspects in the case, following which they were released, Kommersant reported.

With the reduced charges the former Rosagroleasing executives named in the case became eligible for a pardon under an economic amnesty announced by the State Duma in July of last year, the report said.

Initially, Bazhanov and two other suspects in the Rosagroleasing case were charged with fraud committed as part of a criminal group, and faced a possible sentence of up to 10 years imprisonment for allegedly embezzling 1.1 billion rubles (\$34.8 million).

In late December the charges were amended to a less serious version of fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison. The reduced charges also limit the time they can be held under arrest to six months, which allowed the figurants, who have been in police custody since April, to be released until trial.

The Interior Ministry has confirmed the reduction of charges against Bazhanov and his companions as well as their release, but noted that no decision regarding an amnesty for them has been made yet.

Meanwhile, unnamed sources in the law enforcement agencies say that an amnesty for the former officials has already been approved by investigators and the Prosecutor General's Office, Kommersant reported.

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