

Moscow Court Finds Glamorous Ex-Defense Ministry Official Guilty in Corruption Case

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A self-portrait painted by Yevgenia Vasilyeva.

A Moscow court ruled Wednesday that former Defense Ministry official turned celebrity Yevgenia Vasilyeva was guilty of fraud as one of Russia's most high profile corruption trials entered its final stage.

Vasilyeva, who denies her guilt, is accused of stealing 3 billion rubles (\$59 million) in twelve separate incidents as part of a huge graft scheme at the Defense Ministry. She was found guilty of eight of 12 alleged charges of criminal activity, TASS news agency reported Wednesday evening.

The scandal erupted in 2012 and cost several top officials, including then Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, their jobs.

“Yevgenia Vasilyeva, Larisa Yegorina, Maxim Zakutailo, Irina Yegorova and Yury Grekhnev committed property fraud,” the judge said Wednesday, Russian news agency RIA Novosti reported, as Vasilyeva and all her co-defendants were found guilty.

Vasilyeva has courted publicity since her arrest by appearing in pop music videos, trying her hand as a writer and putting on exhibitions of her own artwork. The case has been widely covered by state-owned media with lurid details of her apparently extravagant lifestyle.

Prosecutors originally requested an eight-year prison sentence for Vasilyeva, but last month reversed their position and requested a one million ruble (\$19,500) fine and a suspended sentence.

The corruption charges against Vasilyeva center on Oboronservis, a holding company that was controlled by the Defense Ministry to handle property sales. Several former officials are already serving jail time over their involvement with Oboronservis.

Serdyukov, who was appointed by then-President Dmitry Medvedev to reform Russia's obsolete and inefficient military, was charged with criminal negligence after being accused of using the ministry's resources to help build infrastructure for a holiday home. He was granted amnesty in March 2014 on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Constitution.

The former Defense Minister appeared as a witness in Vasilyeva's trial in January and recounted their long acquaintance, praising her professional qualities and denying she had caused harm.

Vasilyeva worked as an advisor to Serdyukov before she was made head of department. The two officials have been romantically linked, although Serdyukov is married to the daughter of Viktor Zubkov, a former deputy prime minister and confidant of President Vladimir Putin.

In a decision that chimed with the case made by prosecutors, the judge said Wednesday that Vasilyeva was guilty of deceiving Serdyukov, according to the Interfax news agency.

The reading of the sentence began at 14:30 in Moscow and is expected to take several days.

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