

Russia's Arrested Economy Minister Duped Over Rosneft 'Bribe,' Say Lawyers

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Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP

Former Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev was unaware that he was being "bribed" shortly before he was arrested on corruption charges, his legal team claims.

The ex-minister was taken into custody on the evening of Nov. 14 at the offices of the Rosneft state-controlled oil company after receiving two suitcases allegedly containing \$2 million dollars. However, Ulyukayev's lawyers say he was not aware of the suitcase's contents, an unnamed source acquainted with the case [told](#) the Rosbalt news agency.

According to the source, Ulyukayev arrived at the Rosneft office on the personal invitation of CEO Igor Sechin. He came to help troubleshoot issues the company was having related to its recent purchase of a majority stake in the Bashneft regional oil company.

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However, instead of Sechin, one of the company's top managers met Ulyukayev and gave him the suitcases in question. The defense team claims that Ulyukayev believed the suitcases contained documents related to the Bashneft purchase that would speed the work of the Economic Development Ministry.

Ulyukayev was subsequently detained as he attempted to leave the building, and the Russian Investigative Committee filed charges against him during the early morning hours of Nov. 15.

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An anonymous source in law enforcement disputes the defense teams claims. He told Rosbalt that the case against Ulyukayev was sound. Witness testimonies and recordings of the ex-minister's conversations – including one in which he complains to a state bank director that he is not being given a monetary reward for his help with the Bashneft purchase – prove his guilt, the source said.

Ulyukayev's defense also alleges that Russian law enforcement violated the ex-minister's rights during the arrest. Despite being taken into custody in the evening, Ulyukayev was only allowed to consult with a lawyer at 9 a.m. the next morning, they say. However, the Investigative Committee argues that, for much of that time, Ulyukayev was not formally under arrest.

The ex-minister's trial will likely be closed to the public due to the secret nature of some of the investigative materials, Rosbalt's law enforcement source said.

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