

Putin Mulls Scrapping Corruption Charges Against Former Minister – Reports

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Alexei Ulyukayev **Kremlin Press Service**

President Vladimir Putin may downgrade corruption charges against former Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev, Russia's Dozhd television channel reported Wednesday.

Corruption charges against Ulyukayev could be replaced with excess of jurisdiction charges: allowing the former minister to dodge a prison sentence or other serious criminal penalties, an unnamed source told the channel.

Ulyukayev was charged with extorting a \$2 million bribe from Russia's state-controlled oil behemoth Rosneft in November 2016 in exchange for providing a "positive assessment" on the company's bid to buy the recently nationalized oil company Bashneft. The minister was

swiftly placed under house arrest in what was seen by many as the most notorious corruption case in Russia's recent history.

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Other reports have also indicated that the Kremlin could be softening its stance on Ulyukayev. Earlier this month, a high-ranking official told the Moscow Times that to his knowledge, there was no evidence relating to an extortion in the former minister's case.

Last week, Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin also confirmed that the head of company's security service, Oleg Feoktistov, has resigned. Feoktistov, who served with Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) before joining Rosneft, was reported to have orchestrated Ulyukayev's arrest at the Rosneft offices. One anonymous official told the RBC newspaper that he had been asked to resign after he had "overdone it with the minister."

Politically, Vladimir Putin has already achieved what he wanted with Ulyukayev's case, a source close to the government told The Moscow Times. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters last year that Putin had been aware of the case "from the very beginning," and that it had taken place with his explicit approval.

"The message to the officialdom has been sent," the source said. "There is no need for additional sternness anymore."

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