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Former Economy Minister Ulyukayev Apologizes for 'Compromising' in Final Court Appearance

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Alexei Ulyukayev (Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency)

In a final court appearance before sentencing, former Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev on Thursday apologized for “compromising too often” and becoming entangled in a bureaucratic “dance.”

Ulyukayev is the first serving Russian minister to be arrested since the fall of the Soviet Union. He has been under house arrest since his detention in November on charges of having elicited a $2 million bribe from state oil giant Rosneft’s head, Igor Sechin.

“I plead guilty," he told the court. "Of course, not guilty of that absurd accusation against me [...] I’m guilty of compromising too often, seeking the easy way, my career, and wellbeing at the expense of my principles."

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“Only when you yourself get into trouble do you begin to understand how difficult life is for people, the injustices they come up against. As long as your own life is fine, you turn your back on people’s suffering.”

“Forgive me, people,” he added.

From the outset, the trial has been mired in intrigue, with the defense alleging Ulyukayev accepted a bag with cash thinking it was filled with wine and sausages.

Ulyukayev has contributed to the drama of the trial by bringing novels to the courtroom, including Anton Chekhov’s “The Murder” and Franz Kafka’s “The Trial.”

Prosecutors have demanded a 10-year prison sentence and a fine of 500 million rubles ($8.5 million).

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