

Russian Space Contractor Escapes Jail Time After \$6.5M Fraud

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Viktor Grebnev zspk.gov.ru

The former head of a contracting firm charged with embezzling almost \$6.5 million during construction of a Russian spaceport and spending money on luxury goods has received a suspended sentence and escaped jail time.

The Vostochny Cosmodrome, a \$3 billion project seen in Moscow as vital to secure Russia's independent access to space, has been embroiled in allegations of mass fraud and mismanagement. Viktor Grebnev, who headed the TMK contractor until it was declared bankrupt 2015, was [accused](#) of knowingly signing loss-making contracts and using company money to buy yachts and a mansion.

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A district court in Far East Russia handed Grebnev a five-year suspended sentence and fined

him 200,000 rubles (\$3,000) for large-scale embezzlement, Interfax [cited](#) the court as saying.

His attorney Igor Polyakov attributed the light sentence to the state prosecution's inability to prove his client's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

"If his guilt was obvious and he stole that much money, it would have been a long incarceration in a penal colony," Polyakov [said](#).

Grebnev was featured in a 2016 cartoon, [begging](#) President Vladimir Putin for mercy before being pulverized by a flying saucer, produced by a political movement the president had founded earlier this decade.

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Prosecutors had said in 2015 that a probe of 250 organizations working on the Vostochny Cosmodrome project had [discovered](#) \$126 million in damages. A revised estimate late last year [placed](#) the losses at \$150 million, with more than 17,000 violations uncovered since construction began in 2014.

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