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Russia Jails Ex-Official 15 Years in High-Profile Corruption Case

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Alexander Shestun in custody. **Mikhail Pochuyev / TASS**

A former Moscow region official has been sentenced to 15 years in a maximum-security prison on corruption charges Friday, more than a year after a dramatic court hearing during which he attempted to take his own life.

Alexander Shestun, the former head of the Serpukhov district of the Moscow region, was found guilty of taking bribes, fraud, money laundering and illegal participation in entrepreneurial activity, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

In addition to his 15-year prison sentence, the Podolsk city court ordered Shestun to pay a fine of 49 million rubles ($661,000) and forbade him from holding government office for eight years after his release.

Prosecutors had originally asked the court to sentence him to 20 years in a maximum-security prison as well as to fine him 50 million rubles ($675,000) and recover 64 million rubles ($864,000) from him.

Shestun denies his guilt and believes that the case against him is politically motivated.

Before his arrest, he had recorded a video appeal to President Vladimir Putin in an attempt to explain the pressures and threats he is facing. Following the appeal, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said he had "nothing to say on this topic."

During a June 2019 court hearing, Shestun said that the case against him was revenge from Ivan Tkachev, the head of the Federal Security Service (FSB)'s credit and finance counterintelligence unit. He then attempted suicide by cutting his wrists with a disposable razor.

Shestun, who has been in custody since June 2018, also went on hunger strike several times during his two and a half years in detention.

Investigators said Shestun had created 47 private companies through proxies and granted them plots of public land outside of competitive procedures and provided them budget loans at a minimum rate. Investigators later charged him with receiving a 9.4 million ruble ($146,000) bribe.

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