The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

U.S. Deports Russian Businessman Guilty of Sanctions Violation

December 21, 2021



Oleg Nikitin was arrested in March 2019 after attempting to buy a power turbine for a deepwater oil project. **Chatham County Detention Center**

The first Russian businessman to be convicted in the U.S. for violating sanctions has returned to Russia after being deported, the Kommersant business paper reported Tuesday.

Oleg Nikitin, 54, served more than two years in an American jail on charges of attempting to avoid U.S. sanctions against exporting advanced energy equipment to Russia. He was sentenced to 28 months in prison in September, having been first arrested in March 2019.

The energy executive is set to land at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport Tuesday afternoon, having been deported from the U.S. on Monday in line with the terms of his sentence, the Russian state-run TASS news agency said, citing lawyers who have been campaigning to secure Nikitin's return to Russia.

Nikitin pleaded guilty of conspiring to sell a U.S.-made power turbine for use on a Russian Arctic deepwater drilling platform to an "unnamed, Russian-government controlled

business," the U.S. Justice Department said.

Sanctions against Russia — levied in response to Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014 — ban the sale of American technology for use in deepwater oil and gas projects controlled by Russian state-owned companies.

Prosecutors said Nikitin devised a complicated scheme of intermediary purchasers in an attempt to obscure the intended recipient of the banned power turbine from U.S. authorities.

He was first detained in March 2019 as part of a sting operation in which a business partner, working with the FBI, asked Nikitin to travel to the U.S. from his native St. Petersburg to finalize the deal. He was arrested upon arrival in the U.S. and finally pled guilty in March 2021, becoming the first Russian to be prosecuted for violating U.S. sanctions against Russia.

"This defendant was part of a bold scheme to avert United States sanctions in order to put our goods in the hands of actors who are a direct threat to our national security," said FBI Special Agent Chris Hacker at the time.

Nikitin was sentenced to time served and ordered to be deported. According to Kommersant, previous deportation attempts in October and earlier in December were thwarted by American officials before Russia's Foreign Ministry took up his case, campaigners working for his return to Russia said.

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