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Jailed Ex-Minister Ulyukayev Granted Early Release – Reports

April 29, 2022



Former Russian Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev, right, is escorted after listening to the court verdict in Moscow, Russia, Friday, Dec. 15, 2017. **AP Photo/Ivan Sekretarev**

A Russian court has granted early release to former economic development minister Alexei Ulyukayev after less than five years in jail, Russian news agencies reported Friday.

Ulyukayev was found guilty of bribery in December 2017 and sentenced to eight years in prison in a high-profile criminal case that rocked the political elite.

The ex-minister was accused of soliciting a $2 million bribe in a suitcase from Igor Sechin, the influential head of state-owned oil giant Rosneft.

Ulyukayev has always maintained that he was framed.

There has been no independent confirmation of the ruling by a court in the city of Tver, 130 kilometers north of Moscow.

"The issue of Ulyukayev's early release was resolved on April 27," the Interfax news agency

quoted an unnamed source as saying late Thursday.

State-owned news agency RIA Novosti cited a court spokesperson confirming Ulyukayev's early release Friday.

If the reported decision is not appealed, Ulyukayev could walk free in mid-May.

Interfax reported that Tver's Penal Colony No. 1, where Ulyukayev is serving his sentence, noted the ex-minister's "good behavior" and did not oppose his early release.

Ulyukayev is banned from public service as part of the conditions of his conviction, according to newspaper Kommersant.

Ulyukayev was the first serving minister to be put on trial in recent Russian history.

While maintaining he was innocent of the charages against him, Ulyukayev told the court in 2017 that he was "guilty of too often compromising, choosing the easy path, and prioritising career and well-being over my principles."

A long-serving official, Ulyukayev was economic development minister between 2013 and November 2016, when he was detained in a sting operation.

Before that he held senior positions at the Central Bank and the Finance Ministry.

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