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Russia Files Lawsuit Against Country's Wealthiest Businessman

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Andrei Melnichenko. **Sergei Karpukhin / TASS**

The Russian government is suing the country's wealthiest businessman for alleged "corrupt collusion" in a deal to buy a Siberian power plant operator from an ex-minister, according to media reports.

The Prosecutor General's Office seeks to seize the operator, Sibeco, that industrialist Andrei Melnichenko had purchased from ex-minister Mikhail Abyzov in 2018, Forbes Russia reported Sunday.

Melnichenko, the founder and ex-beneficiary of fertilizer producer EuroChem and coal producer SUEK, became Russia's wealthiest billionaire this year, with a net worth of $25 billion thanks to rising prices for those commodities.

Abyzov, a onetime close ally of former President Dmitry Medvedev, was arrested in 2019 and his assets were seized by the state. He is currently on trial for fraud.

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In an Aug. 17 lawsuit, the Prosecutor General's Office said there were grounds for the Russian state to nationalize "everything received by the parties [Melnichenko and his legal entities] under anti-social transactions," Forbes added, citing case files published by the energy and utility industry-focused Telegram channel SovetBezRynka.

The value of the transaction was placed at 32.51 billion rubles ($345 million).

A hearing has been reportedly scheduled in the city of Krasnoyarsk for Sept. 7.

His reported legal battle comes amid the Kremlin's wider efforts to entice wealthy Russians to bring their assets back home following the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Melnichenko himself has described the war in Ukraine as "tragic."

The billionaire — who is under EU and Swiss sanctions — is primarily based in the United Arab Emirates, the Financial Times reported.

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