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Ex-Kursk Governor Testifies Against Predecessor in Border Defense Corruption Trial

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Alexei Smirnov in court. **@moscowcourts**

Former Kursk region Governor Alexei Smirnov testified against his late predecessor Roman Starovoit in court this week and entered into a plea bargain with state prosecutors, marking the latest development in a years-long corruption saga involving border defense construction projects.

Smirnov, who served as governor between May and December 2024, was arrested on fraud charges last year along with his first deputy, Alexei Dedov. The two men were accused of embezzling public funds meant for defense fortifications along the border with Ukraine.

Their arrests came after the Ukrainian military launched a surprise offensive into the Kursk region in August 2024 and seized large swaths of territory. Ukraine was forced to retreat from the region early last year following a Russian counteroffensive.

Smirnov's predecessor, Roman Starovoit, who became Russia's transportation minister in May 2024, shot himself last July amid reports that he was also under investigation in the corruption case.

"Smirnov confirmed testimony he provided during the investigation that he was aware Roman Starovoit received tens of millions of rubles in kickbacks," the press service of the Kursk region's court system said Wednesday.

The confirmation was made during a court session into Dedov's case, with hearings having started earlier this month.

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The business newspaper Kommersant reported that Smirnov testified that Starovoit had orchestrated a kickback scheme where bribes from contractors selected to construct border fortifications and rebuild occupied areas were split among regional officials.

Smirnov reportedly estimated that Starovoit may have received 100 million rubles ($1.2 million) in the scheme, while he and Dedov kept approximately 30 million rubles ($367,000).

On Friday, the press service for the Kursk region's court system said Smirnov entered into a plea bargain, allowing his case to be heard without the examination of evidence and witness testimonies. It also means Smirnov will likely receive a reduced prison sentence.

The next hearing in the case is scheduled for Thursday.

At least 11 officials and business executives have been implicated in related border construction cases, Russian media reported.

Last month, a Kursk judge sentenced the former chief executive of a local construction company and three managers to between seven and nine years in prison after finding them guilty of defrauding the government through defense fortification contracts.

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