

Sacked Russian Deputy Minister Flees to U.S. Amid Fraud Probe, Sources Say

May 01, 2026



Denis Butsayev (center) seen at an environmental forum in St. Petersburg just weeks before he reportedly fled Russia. **Alexei Smagin**

Denis Butsayev, a high-ranking Russian official who was recently dismissed from the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, has reportedly fled to the United States to escape criminal prosecution, independent journalist Farida Rustamova [reported](#) Thursday.

Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin formally [dismissed](#) Butsayev as deputy minister on April 22, government documents show.

Earlier, sources [told](#) the newspaper Vedomosti that the sacked deputy minister slipped out of the country after being fired, traveling through neighboring Belarus. However, two government sources told Rustamova that Butsayev left on April 18.

“Butsayev’s departure is the first known case of a sitting official of this rank fleeing the country,” Rustamova wrote, noting that he is also the first official since 2024 to successfully evade prosecution by going abroad.

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The former deputy minister, who is not currently under Western sanctions, traveled via Minsk, Belarus, and Tbilisi, Georgia, before arriving in the United States, the two government sources told Rustamova.

“[Butsayev] is lucky to have friends who were able to warn him on time,” one of the sources was quoted as saying.

The Moscow Times contacted the U.S. State Department for comment.

Before joining the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry in 2025, Butsayev served as CEO of the Russian Environmental Operator, a government-sponsored enterprise created in 2019 to manage the Kremlin’s national waste management reforms.

Both Vedomosti and Rustamova reported that Russian law enforcement authorities are investigating the company’s administrative director and two other senior managers for fraud.

Butsayev is reportedly a person of interest in that investigation, though it was not immediately clear if he faced any charges.

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