

Vasilyeva Calls Charges Against Her 'Blackmail'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A lead suspect in the ongoing Oboronservis corruption probe has said the charges against her were fabricated to force her to testify against her former boss, ex-Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov.

Yevegnia Vasilyeva, the former head of the Defense Ministry's property department, is accused of multiple counts of fraud and embezzlement, and multiple other counts along with six other suspects in the case, the Investigative Committee said in a statement on its website.

Serdyukov was not mentioned among the suspects.

Vasilyeva, who is under house arrest, said in an open letter that investigators had previously "blackmailed" her with threats of prison, trying to force her to testify against her former boss, and that she would not take any plea bargain offers.

"They need me to smear Serdyukov's honor," she said in the letter, published on the Ekho Moskvyy website. "No circumstances would force me to besmear and belie the former defense minister of Russia and my former co-workers."

Investigators earlier seized from Vasilyeva six pieces of real estate, a collection of rare watches and 19 kilograms of jewelry, including 57,000 diamonds, rubies and emeralds. The value of the jewelry and watches was estimated at more than 126 million rubles (\$3.9 million), Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin said.

Vasilyeva, the daughter of a wealthy St. Petersburg businessman, said that all the real estate had been purchased before she started working in the Defense Ministry's property department.

Vasilyeva also said she was confident she would be acquitted at trial, adding that the "endless amounts of lies and absurdities that have littered the Russian media" were "evidence of the weakness and inadequacy of the prosecution."

Another suspect in the case, Maxim Zakutailo, who headed a company linked to Oboronservis, has agreed to cooperate with the prosecution and confessed to the charges against him, investigators said. He was released on his own recognizance from pretrial detention after signing a pledge not to leave town.

Investigators said they have also completed their case against Alexander Yelkin, former general director of Slavyanka, another company affiliated with the Defense Ministry.

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