

Ukrainian Oligarch Firtash Slams U.S. for 'Purely Political' Arrest in Austria

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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VIENNA — Ukrainian industrialist Dmitry Firtash, arrested in Austria last week at the request of the U.S. pending his possible extradition for suspected corruption, accused Washington on Tuesday of having him detained for "purely political" reasons.

Firtash, one of Ukraine's most influential oligarchs, thrived under ousted President Viktor Yanukovich and has close ties to Russia through his gas business, but U.S. and Austrian authorities deny his detention is linked to the current tense East-West standoff over Ukraine's breakaway region of Crimea.

The Austrian court holding him said Firtash, 46, had intended to post 125 million euros (\$174 million) in bail on Tuesday — a record sum in Austria — but later said the funds had still not arrived, delaying his expected release from detention.

In his first public comments since Viennese police took him into custody on March 12, Firtash,

who has interests in gas trading and chemicals, linked his detention directly to the crisis in Ukraine pitting the West against Russia.

"The reason for my detention in Vienna last week was without foundation and I believe strongly that the motivation was purely political," he said in a statement released through a Vienna public relations firm.

"The president of the U.S., Barack Obama, has said that the U.S. will impose economic sanctions on Russia so as a Ukrainian, why I was detained is as bewildering as it was unfair," he said.

U.S. authorities have been investigating Firtash since 2006, Austrian authorities have said. Austria's Federal Crime Agency said last week Firtash was suspected of violating laws on bribery and of forming a criminal organization in the course of foreign business deals.

"My detention will seriously threaten many Ukrainian jobs and destroy my business," Firtash said in his statement.

"But this unjust action by the U.S. cuts much deeper and, if their legal moves continue, further harm and anguish will be caused among my fellow Ukrainian citizens."

Firtash is not among the 11 Ukrainians and Russians that Washington has targeted with visa bans and asset freezes in retaliation for Russia's annexation of Crimea. He is also not on a list of 21 officials approved on Monday by the European Union.

A spokeswoman for the Austrian court that ordered Firtash held last Friday for possible extradition to the U.S. said that, contrary to earlier expectations, he would not be released on bail on Tuesday.

"We do not have the money yet and I just got a call from the judge in charge that the money will not be wired today," she said. The spokeswoman gave no further details.

A final decision on his extradition to the U.S. could take weeks. He has sworn not to leave Austria if he posts the record-high bail, which the court said took into account his wealth and the gravity of the allegations against him.

Forbes Ukraine magazine last year put Firtash in 14th place on its Ukrainian rich list, setting his fortune at \$673 million.

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