

Beat: Politics

Bulgarian court acquits former defense minister in bribery trial

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USPA News - A Bulgarian court on Monday acquitted former defense minister Nikolay Tsonev and two others who were charged with abuse of power after they allegedly tried to pay money to get a positive outcome in another case. The prosecution is likely to appeal the verdict.

Tsonev, former Sofia City Court judge Petar Santirov and former finance ministry secretary Tencho Popov were arrested in March and April 2010 after they allegedly attempted to pay 20,000 euros (\$25,810) to investigator Petyo Petrov to get a positive outcome in another investigation against the former defense minister. But they denied the charges, saying the trial had been ordered by the government. "The order for this trial came from the executive power and was realized by the prosecutor's office," Tsonev was quoted as saying by the Bulgarian news portal "Focus". "The executive power wanted to convict a minister from the previous government, so as to show that it fights." The prosecutor's office previously asked the court to order lengthy jail sentences, including seven years for Tsonev, six years for Popov and five years for Santirov, in addition to a 7,670 euros (\$9,900) fine for all three individuals. It was not immediately known why the Sofia City Court acquitted the three men, but its motives will be released within 30 days. The prosecution is expected to appeal Monday's verdict. Tsonev, a minister from the previous Socialist-led government, was earlier also acquitted of malfeasance charges and a charge of criminal breach of trust, both allegedly committed in 1999 when he was an employee of the country's defense ministry. Prime Minister Boyko Borisov promised to fight corruption when he came to power in July 2009.

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