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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Southern District of Georgia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

Russian national and engineering company admit guilt in scheme to evade U.S. national security trade sanctions

International investigation continues against other defendants

SAVANNAH, GA: A Russian national and his engineering company have admitted to charges that they violated U.S. national security laws.

Oleg Vladislavovich Nikitin, general director of **KS Engineering (KSE)**, a St. Petersburg, Russia-based energy company, pled guilty in U.S. District Court to conspiracy to evade U.S. export regulations and to defraud the United States, said David H. Estes, Acting U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia. The charge was brought in a third superseding indictment, *USA v. World Mining and Oil Supply et. al*, alleging Nikitin and his co-defendants conspired to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and the Export Control Reform Act of 2018 (ECRA).

As a result of the plea entered before U.S. District Court Judge R. Stan Baker, Nikitin faces up to five years in federal prison and substantial fines and forfeitures, followed by up to three years of supervised release.

"Oleg Nikitin attempted to evade trade sanctions designed to protect the United States from illegal acquisition of industrial equipment by non-aligned powers," said Acting U.S. Attorney Estes. "We will maximize the use of our nation's resources to vigorously defend against those who threaten our national security."

As described in court documents and testimony, Nikitin and KSE admitted conspiring with others to evade U.S. trade sanctions that prohibited export of equipment that could make "a significant contribution to the military potential or nuclear proliferation of other nations, or that could be detrimental to the foreign police or national security of the United States."

The conspiracy began when an unnamed Russian government-controlled business contracted with Nikitin and KSE to purchase a power turbine from a U.S.-based manufacturer for approximately \$17.3 million. The Russian company intended to use the turbine on a Russian Arctic deepwater drilling platform, expressly prohibited by the U.S. Department of Commerce without first obtaining a license.

Nikitin admitted that he and another KSE employee, **Anton Cheremukhin**, conspired with **Gabrielle Villone** and his Italian-based company, GVA International Oil and Gas Services (GVA); and GVA employee Bruno

Caparini, to obtain the turbine on their behalf. Villone, Caprini and GVA then employed the services of **Dali Bagrou** and World Mining and Oil Supply (WMO) of Dacula, Ga., to procure the turbine from a U.S.-based manufacturer and to have the turbine shipped overseas. The parties conspired to conceal the true end user of the turbine from both the U.S. manufacturer and the U.S. government by submitting false documentation that stated it would be used by a U.S. company in and around Atlanta.

Nikitin, Villone, and Bagrou were all arrested in Savannah, Ga., while attempting to complete the illegal transaction. Villone was sentenced in June 2020 to 28 months in prison after pleading guilty to the conspiracy. Bagrou remains in custody pending further legal action, and is considered innocent unless and until found guilty in court.

“Special Agents of the Bureau of Industry and Security’s Office of Export Enforcement (OEE) are committed to bringing sanctions violators, who have willfully chosen to threaten our nation’s security, to justice,” said Ariel Joshua Leinwand, Special Agent in Charge of OEE’s Miami Field Office. “These guilty pleas represent the results of an intensive and collaborative approach with our law enforcement partners to vigorously enforce our nation’s export control laws.”

“The illegal export of technology poses a great danger to the United States,” said Special Agent in Charge, Cynthia A. Bruce, DCIS Southeast Field Office. “DCIS and our investigative partners will aggressively pursue and bring to justice those who threaten our national security.”

“This was a methodical plan by Nikitin and his partners to undercut United States sanctions and put our goods in the hands of actors that are a direct threat to our national security,” said Chris Hacker, Special Agent in Charge of FBI Atlanta. “Today’s plea doesn’t mean our work is done. The FBI and our partners will always make threats to our national security a top priority.”

“U.S. Customs and Border Protection takes great pride in working with our partner government agencies to vigorously enforce U.S. export control laws as part of our overall duties and responsibilities in protecting and preserving our national security,” said Henry DeBlock, Area Port Director for CBP Savannah.

The Department of Commerce, Bureau of Industry and Security, Office of Export Enforcement, as well as the Defense Criminal Investigative Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are investigating the case with assistance from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and Customs and Border Protection. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jennifer G. Solari and Steven H. Lee are prosecuting the case with Trial Attorney William A. Mackie of the National Security Division’s Counterintelligence and Export Control Section.

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