

Beat: Politics

Algeria issues arrest warrants for former energy minister, 8 others

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USPA News - Algeria has issued international arrest warrants for nine people, including former energy and mining minister Chakib Khellil, in connection with Italian firms paying bribes to secure oil contracts in the North African country, prosecutors announced Monday. Algiers Attorney-General Belkacem Zeghmati said the international arrest warrants were issued in late July but were not made public until Monday.

He said Chakib Khellil, the minister's wife, their two children and a person named Farid Bedjaoui were among the nine people on the list of warrants. Italian prosecutors have accused Bedjaoui of acting as an intermediary and channeling more than 197 million euros (\$262.2 million) in bribes to high-ranking Algerian officials, apparently in order to secure oil contracts for Italian oil services group Saipem. The money was deposited to bank accounts belonging to a Hong Kong-based company called Pearl Partners Limited, which is owned by Bedjaoui. The bribes on behalf of Saipem were paid between 2007 and 2009, allegedly to obtain seven contracts in Algeria that were worth as much as 8 billion euros (\$10.6 billion). Khellil previously served as the president of Algerian oil group Sonatrach, which is also being investigated over corruption allegations. Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika recently condemned the corruption and bribery allegations, saying he would not ignore the scandals. "This information rouses our rebellion and disapproval, but I have trust in the justice of our country to clarify it and determine responsibility and strictly enforce the sanctions foreseen by our legislation," he said, according to the official APS news agency.

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