

Argentina's Former Economy Minister Sentenced to Three Years in Prison



Buenos Aires, April 07 (EFE-RHC) Former Argentine Economy Minister Felisa Miceli on Monday was sentenced to three years in prison in the case where an unusual amount of money was found in 2007 in the private bathroom in her office in the Treasury Palace, court officials said. However, the ex-minister will not serve time behind bars because the sentence was deemed to be "in suspension," whereby sentences of up to three years in prison are not served.

"It would be a tremendous injustice to become a prisoner. I have regretted it. It makes me furious," said Miceli, in tears on Monday morning in her final statement in court before the verdict was issued. The court had set a new sentence to replace the one imposed on her in 2012.

In justifying her stance, the former minister said she had "regretted" for keeping the money - the origin of which she refused to explain to law enforcement authorities - in her office.

"I made a mistake. I will never occupy a public office again. I learned my lesson. It's not out of fear that I don't want to go to jail, but rather because it makes me angry, it hurts me that it can be so unfair," she said.

In December 2012, a *Buenos Aires* court sentenced Miceli to four years in prison for covering up a crime

and for theft of a public document when it determined that she had not adequately specified the origin of the 100,000 pesos (some \$11,325) that police found in a bag in the bathroom of her office five years before, during the administration of Nestor Kirchner.

The former official's defense team appealed that ruling, but the Federal Chamber confirmed the sentence, although it said that the trial court would review the sentence.

The money was found during a routine inspection by the bomb squad in June 2007 and the scandal cut short the career of Miceli, an economist who was very close to the late Kirchner.

Miceli became economy minister on Nov. 28, 2005, and was the first woman in Argentine history to hold that post, which she resigned on June 16, 2007, amid the scandal over the money found in her office.

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