

Presidential Affairs Official Investigated

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The Investigative Committee has opened a criminal investigation into Vladimir Leshchevsky, a senior official in the Office for Presidential Affairs accused of receiving bribes in exchange for Olympics work.

Investigators said Wednesday that they began a check following a statement by Moskonversprom chief Valery Morozov, who alleged that officials were taking kickbacks in exchange for construction contracts in Sochi.

Leshchevsky, deputy head of the office's capital construction department, asked for a 12 percent kickback from every payment for agreeing to let him rebuild a wing of the Sochi sanatorium, Morozov said.

Vladimir Kozhin, director of the Office for Presidential Affairs, suspended Leshchevsky after the criminal case was opened and pending its results, spokesman Viktor Khrekov said. The investigation is the first involving such a senior official from the office, he said.

Morozov said Tuesday that he received a letter refusing to open a criminal case against Leshchevsky, signed by S. Olkhovnikov, an investigator for especially important cases for the Investigative Committee's investigation department in the Central Federal District.

The document, a copy of which was obtained by Vedomosti, said Leshchevsky's actions "did not constitute a crime." It was dated Aug. 4.

Morozov called the refusal incorrect and preconceived. "From what I've heard, it raised some anger in the Prosecutor General's Office and the presidential administration," he said.

In July, Novaya Gazeta reported that President Dmitry Medvedev had ordered Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika to get to the bottom of the accusations being made against the Office for Presidential Affairs.

The Investigative Committee, a semi-autonomous body within the Prosecutor General's Office, declined to comment.

A law enforcement source said the case was opened by the Central Federal District's investigative department and then handed over to the Investigative Committee.

The case is complicated and ambiguous, but it will be investigated thoroughly, the source said. Investigators must look into Leshchevsky's actions as well as Morozov's. There are currently no criminal cases against employees of the Interior Ministry's economic security department, the source told Vedomosti.

Olkhovnikov's order said staff from the ministry's economic security department monitored Morozov's transfers of money to Leshchevsky, but investigative work was halted because there was not enough information showing that the official had committed a crime.

The data from the monitoring was not requested in time and destroyed, in line with instructions.

Medvedev ordered Chaika to investigate after Novaya Gazeta's report, and he has been briefed on the case regularly, an official in the presidential administration said. The Kremlin knows that material evidence was destroyed and considers it a problem, the source said.

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