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Moscow Court Orders Arrest of Lawyer Granted U.S. Asylum

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A Moscow court Wednesday ordered the arrest of a prominent human rights lawyer who has been granted political asylum in the U.S.

The Presnensky District Court said lawyer Boris Kuznetsov should be jailed on suspicion of divulging state secrets in connection with a case from the mid-2000s.

The Federal Security Service accused Kuznetsov of revealing state secrets after he provided the Constitutional Court with documentation saying the FSB had illegally wiretapped the phone conversations of his client, former Federation Council Senator Levon Chakhmakhchyan.

Kuznetsov flew to the U.S. in 2007 and was granted asylum a year later.

Investigators argued in court Wednesday that Kuznetsov went to the U.S. to avoid prosecution and complained that he had ignored summons for questioning in the criminal case against him.

Kuznetsov's lawyer, Robert Zinoviyev, denied that his client was hiding in the U.S. and said he had registered with the Russian consulate.

"He went to the U.S. for medical treatment and no one blocked him; investigators were informed that he was leaving," he said, Interfax reported. "After the criminal case was opened, Kuznetsov received political asylum in the U.S."

Another defense lawyer, Ruslan Zakalyuzhny, said it was clear that the case was politically motivated, while a third said Russian authorities would not be able to arrest Kuznetsov by placing him on an international wanted list.

"A person who has the status of a political refugee cannot be placed on the international wanted list. This would directly contradict Russian legislation," said the lawyer, Ruslan Koblev, Interfax reported. "Interpol cannot search for a person who has political asylum."

He also said the statute of limitations had expired in the case.

Kuznetsov has represented a number of high-profile clients, including the relatives of the 118 sailors who perished in the Kursk submarine sinking in 2000 and the family of slain journalist Anna Politkovskaya.

If tried and convicted of divulging state secrets, Kuznetsov faces a prison sentence of up to seven years.

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