

Audit Chamber Investigating \$1.5M Hermitage Reconstruction Embezzlement

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Authorities have started conducting searches in St. Petersburg and Moscow as part of an investigation into the suspected embezzlement of more than 50 million rubles (\$1.5 million) allocated for the reconstruction of the east wing of the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.

The Russian Audit Chamber's preliminary findings say that the restoration company Intarsia, the Culture Ministry and St. Petersburg's investment fund tampered with the original building plans in order to pilfer funds between 2010 and 2013, Interfax reported.

Funding for the first phase of the Hermitage restoration project was split between the Russian government's 80 percent contribution and the World Bank's 20 percent.

Earlier this week, St. Petersburg's investment fund head Andrei Vasilyev announced costs for the project would exceed the budget by an estimated 5 billion rubles, rising to a total of 15

billion rubles. Vasilyev, said that the 50 percent increase was the natural result of inflation and unforeseen costs.

The restoration of the Hermitage's east wing was originally planned to be completed by the museum's 250th anniversary jubilee in 2014.

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