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Court Sanctions Arrest of Top Tourism Official in $757 Million Fraud Case

By The Moscow Times

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A Moscow court on Friday ordered the arrest of the deputy head of the Federal Tourism Agency, who is accused of conspiring to steal 28 billion rubles ($750 million) from mid-sized lender Mezhprombank.

Despite character references from senior government officials and movie director Nikita Mikhailkov, Moscow's Basmanny Court put Dmitry Amunts under arrest until Oct. 20, Interfax reported. Prosecutors sought Amunts's arrest because they said, if set free on bail, he could hinder the ongoing investigation or seek to flee the country.

Investigators allege Amunts was part of a criminal gang that stole 28 billion rubles loaned by the Russian Central Bank to Mezhprombank between 2008 and 2009.

Amunts was charged Friday with embezzlement, which is punishable by up to 10 years in prison, according to a statement on the Investigative Committee's website.

Other prominent figures linked to the case include former senator and businessman Sergei Pugachyov, for whom Russia has issued an international arrest warrant, and Alexander Didenko, a branch manager at state-owned lender Sberbank.

Already under arrest, Didenko, the former chief executive of Mezhprombank, was also charged on Friday, according to the Investigative Committee.

At the time of the alleged fraud, Amunts was the director of OPK Development, the development arm of an industrial holding under Pugachyov's control. Pugachyov himself was the chairman of Mezhprombank and Didenko the chief executive.

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