The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

FSB's Anti-Extremism Department Involved in Serebrennikov Case

August 30, 2017



Director Kirill Serebrennikov **Andreev Vladimir / URA.RU / TASS**

The Federal Security Services department tasked with protecting Russia from internal threats is overseeing a high-profile embezzlement case against prominent director Kirill Serebrennikov, the RBC outlet reports, citing three unidentified sources.

Serebrennikov was placed under house arrest last week after he was detained by law enforcement and charged with embezzling 68 million rubles ($1.1 million) in government subsidies as part of a theater project connected to Moscow's Gogol Center.

The FSB's Service to Protect the Constitutional System and Combat Terrorism is "a sub-unit 'specialized' in fighting threats to Russian security in the sociopolitical sphere," its then-head Gennady Zotov told the Novaya Gazeta newspaper at the time of its founding in the late 90s.

A source close to the Culture Ministry told RBC the FSB's so-called "2nd department" routinely "oversees the ministry's activities."

Related article: Director Kirill Serebrennikov in Court

Retired special services veteran Alexander Mikhailov confirmed the claim, saying that the department supervised theaters and museums. "Highly qualified specialists work in that department, who understand culture and art," he was cited as saying.

As part of its work, the FSB branch taps phone conversations, controls written correspondence, inspects facilities and embeds its own agents in the cultural scene, Mikhailov said.

"Cultural institutions can be used by the enemy for propaganda purposes, as structures that form a hostile attitude toward Russia," he was cited as saying.

Five current and former Gogol Center and Seventh Studio executives, including Serebrennikov, have been implicated in the case.

The case is widely considered to be politically motivated — a claim Russia's Culture Minister has denied.

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