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Russian Scientology Churches Raided in Fraud Investigation

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Russian security forces have raided the offices of the Church of Scientology in Moscow and St. Petersburg on Thursday in connection with an investigation into defrauded homebuyers.

Investigators believe the church may have transferred around 3 billion rubles to its U.S. headquarters in recent years, according to the state-run TASS news agency. The funds were raised during seminars and training sessions held without a license, with an estimated 3-4 million rubles ($45,000-61,000) being raised per week in St. Petersburg, Leningrad region's FSB press service was cited as saying.

The press service on Friday published a video of the raids.

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"Early indications say more than 400 co-investors were defrauded out of around 800 million rubles [$12.3 million]," Interfax quoted St. Petersburg and Leningrad region police as saying.

Investigators opened the St. Petersburg defrauded homebuyers case in June 2017.

A St. Petersburg court sentenced the chairwoman of several housing cooperatives last year to 8.5 years behind bars for donating more than 160 million rubles to the Scientology church in Moscow.

The security services accused the Church of extremism, inciting hatred, and operating an illegal business when raiding its office in St. Petersburg in 2017. The Church of Scientology headquarters in St. Petersburg was also raided in March 2018 and June 2016.

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