The Moscow Times
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Prosecutors Seek 6-Year Jail Term for Russian Director

By AFP

June 22, 2020



Kirill Serebrennikov's trial has attracted international attention and calls for his release everywhere from Hollywood to Cannes. **Maxim Shipenkov / EPA / TASS**

Russian prosecutors on Monday called for a six-year prison sentence for acclaimed director Kirill Serebrennikov, accused of embezzling public funds in a case that has stirred criticism at home and abroad.

Serebrennikov is charged with creating an organized criminal group with his colleagues and embezzling more than $2 million of state funding for a theater project called Platforma.

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He has insisted the money was used properly and calls the charges "absurd."

The prosecution asked the judge to sentence Serebrennikov to six years in prison and a fine of 800,000 rubles ($11,536), an AFP reporter in the Moscow court said.

The 50-year-old head of Moscow's Gogol Center theater — who supporters say is facing politically motivated charges — was detained in August 2017.

In April last year, he and his co-defendants Sofia Apfelbaum and Yury Itin were released from house arrest in a ruling which allowed the director to leave his apartment in Moscow and communicate freely.

The prosecution on Monday requested jail terms of four years and fines of 200,000 rubles each for Apfelbaum and Itin.

It requested five years in prison and a 300,000 ruble fine for a fourth defendant, Alexey Malobrodsky.

The embezzlement trial has attracted international attention and calls for his release everywhere from Hollywood to Cannes.

In 2012, Serebrennikov was appointed as the director of the small state-funded Gogol Center, which he turned into one of Moscow's best theaters and a favorite of the liberal intelligentsia.

Yet Serebrennikov's work has angered cultural conservatives in Russia who see his frequent use of on-stage nudity and obscene language, as well as modern adaptations of classics, as a step too far.

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