

‘World’s Most Wanted Man’ Under Russian Intelligence Protection – Reports

July 20, 2020



Payments company Wirecard collapsed overnight last month after admitting that 1.9 billion euros missing from its accounts likely did not exist. **SvenSimon / TASS**

A top executive of disgraced payments company Wirecard is believed to be in hiding near Moscow under the protection of Russia’s GRU military intelligence agency, the German newspaper Handelsblatt [reported](#) Sunday.

Wirecard collapsed in June after admitting that 1.9 billion euros (\$2.2 billion) missing from its accounts likely did not exist, in what auditors said appeared to be an "elaborate and sophisticated fraud." German authorities arrested its ex-CEO and former chief operating officer Jan Marsalek, 40, is [on the run](#) from as many as three Western intelligence agencies.

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Jan Marsalek, one of the world's most wanted men, is now apparently in Russia, in a GRU safehouse west of Moscow, says [@handelsblatt](#) citing sources via [@CazeresFlorian](#) <https://t.co/PaKimJNpbv>

— Anna Smolchenko (@Annaafp) [July 20, 2020](#)

Marsalek is believed to be under GRU supervision in a property west of Moscow, Handelsblatt cited unnamed business, judicial and diplomatic sources as saying.

Germany's Der Spiegel news magazine, the investigative website Bellingcat and Russia's The Insider news website reported this weekend that Marsalek [fled](#) to Belarus via Estonia hours after his firing on June 18. Belarus and Russia have had virtually no border control since 1995.

Handelsblatt wrote that current political tensions between Belarus and Russia made it "too risky" for the GRU to leave Marsalek in Minsk.

Marsalek has "often styled himself as a secret agent" in private conversations and "must have worked closely with the GRU" during his visits to war-torn Syria and while making investments in Libya, Handelsblatt reported.

Bellingcat's investigation said that the Austrian citizen made more than 60 trips to Russia over the past decade.

Wirecard had been a rising star on the Frankfurt stock exchange until reports by the Financial Times and other media [questioned](#) its business and accounting practices.

The Kremlin said Monday it was [unaware](#) of Marsalek's whereabouts.

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

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