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Kyrgyzstan Arrests Russian Cultural Agency Employee Over Suspected Ukraine War Recruitment

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The "Russian House" in Osh, Kyrgyzstan. **Rushouse Osh**

Law enforcement authorities in Kyrgyzstan arrested an employee of Russia's state-funded cultural diplomacy agency Rossotrudnichestvo and three others on charges of recruiting locals for the war in Ukraine, media reported Tuesday.

A court in the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek on Saturday placed Natalia Sekerina in pre-trial detention until June 17 on charges of mercenary activities, according to Radio Azattyk, the Kyrgyzstan desk of the U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) news organization.

Sekerina was described as a Rossotrudnichestvo staff member in the Central Asian country's second-largest city of Osh. Alongside her, the court placed Osh Mayor's Office press secretary Sergei Lapushkin and two other unidentified individuals in pre-trial detention on the same charges.

Rossotrudnichestvo's office in Kyrgyzstan expressed "alarm" over Sekerina's arrest but said it lacked the full details surrounding her case, the Russian news agency Interfax reported Wednesday.

"Sekerina is a Kyrgyz citizen, a local employee of the branch who has been working at the Russian House since July 2024," Rossotrudnichestvo was quoted as saying.

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According to Interfax, a lawyer representing one of the defendants said they are suspected of recruiting citizens of Kyrgyzstan to fight in Russia's war against Ukraine.

Sekerina and the three others face up to 15 years in prison on mercenary charges under Kyrgyzstan's criminal code.

Kyrgyzstan is among Russia's closest allies in Central Asia and has faced accusations of serving as a back door for Moscow to buy sanctioned Western goods.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, courts in the Central Asian country have sentenced several Kyrgyz citizens to prison on mercenary charges.

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