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Kyrgyzstan Places Russian Cultural Agency Employee Under House Arrest

April 28, 2025

An event at the Russian House in Osh, Kyrgyzstan. **Rushouse Osh**

A court in Kyrgyzstan ruled to place an employee of Russia's state-funded cultural exchange agency Rossotrudnichestvo under house arrest after she was detained on suspicion of recruiting locals for the Russian military, the Interfax news agency reported Monday.

Media reported last week that Kyrgyz law enforcement authorities arrested four people on charges of mercenary activities, a crime that is punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Rossotrudnichestvo's Natalia Sekerina and the three others were initially placed in pre-trial detention until June 17. Interfax reported that a second person, identified as local businessman Vladimir Sirotenko, was also placed under house arrest.

Media reports previously identified the other two as Sergei Lapushkin, spokesman for the mayor's office of Kyrgyzstan's second-largest city of Osh, and Viktor Vasilyev, a political consultant described by investigative media as a "white nationalist GRU agent."

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The Insider reported that Vasilyev served prison time for murdering a Sri Lankan man in the Moscow metro in 2009. After his release, he allegedly changed his name from Lukovenko to Vasilyev and launched a career as a pro-Kremlin Africa expert.

Russia's GRU military intelligence agency reportedly sent Vasilyev to spy on a Kazakh nationalist in Ukraine days before Russian troops invaded the country in February 2022, according to the investigative news outlet Dossier Center.

Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries are long-time allies of Russia. After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the former Soviet republics warned their citizens against enlisting in foreign militaries and have since prosecuted several of them on mercenary charges.

Sekerina and Sirotenko's house arrest rulings were handed out last Friday and did not include Lapushkin and Vasilyev, according to Radio Azattyk, the Kyrgyzstan desk of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). The U.S.-funded outlet described Sirotenko as an electric lamp factory employee in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Earlier on Friday, local media claimed that the head of Kyrgyzstan's domestic security agency met with Russia's Ambassador in Bishkek to discuss the arrests. The report described Sekerina, Sirotenko, Lapushkin and Vasilyev as "freelance employees" of Rossotrudnichestvo.

Officials from the two countries reportedly agreed that those among the detained individuals who hold Kyrgyz citizenship would be placed under house arrest.

Radio Azattyk reported that the court did not receive requests to transfer Lapushkin and Vasilyev under house arrest.

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