

Border Defense Fraud Probe Targets Belgorod Region Officials – Kommersant

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A bomb shelter in the city of Belgorod. **Nikolai Mikhhalchenko / TASS**

Russian law enforcement authorities launched a criminal investigation into an alleged \$12 million fraud scheme tied to border defense construction in the Belgorod region, the Kommersant business newspaper [reported](#) Friday, citing anonymous sources familiar with the case.

Former Belgorod region Deputy Governor Rustem Zainullin, four businessmen and two construction firms have been named as defendants in the case, according to the sources.

Zainullin and three businessmen were said to have been placed in custody in Moscow on large-scale fraud charges, while one suspect remains at large. The head of the Belgorod region's department of construction, Alexei Soshnikov, is reportedly a witness in the case.

Investigators claim that Zainullin and Soshnikov awarded 26 contracts between 2022 and 2024 worth more than 1.1 billion rubles (\$14.6 million) to the two firms. The contracts are alleged to have involved kickbacks, shell companies and misappropriated funds.

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The federal government allocated 19.5 billion rubles (\$250 million) for border defense projects in the Belgorod region, including anti-tank barriers, trenches and dugouts, Kommersant said.

Zainullin was reportedly responsible for overseeing the projects, while Soshnikov's department served as the general contractor. Zainullin [denies](#) the charges, according to sources.

Russia's Prosecutor General's Office is seeking nearly 925 million rubles (\$11.9 million) in damages from those charged.

If Kommersant's reporting is officially confirmed, Belgorod would become the second border region where police have launched an investigation into alleged corruption in the construction of border fortifications.

In the neighboring Kursk region, defensive structures that were breached during a Ukrainian incursion last August reportedly cost 15 billion rubles (\$192 million) and took almost three years to complete.

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