The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Founder of Pro-Kremlin News Outlet Readovka Arrested on Fraud Charges, Sources Say

February 27, 2026



Alexei Kostylev. **Artyom Geodakyan / TASS**

Russian police have arrested Alexei Kostylev, the founder and former editor-in-chief of the pro-Kremlin news outlet Readovka, on charges of fraud, RBC reported on Friday, citing anonymous law enforcement sources.

Kostylev was arrested on Wednesday, the sources said, and investigators are requesting that a judge order him to be placed in pre-trial detention for two months.

According to the Telegram channel Russian Life, where Kostylev currently serves as editor-in-chief, a court hearing is expected to take place on Friday.

Neither RBC nor Russian Life provided details on the fraud charges against the journalist.

Anonymous police sources told the state-run news agency TASS that Kostylev is suspected of engaging in fraudulent activities involving at least 1 million rubles ($13,000).

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In 2011, Kostylev launched Readovka as a news channel on the Russian social media website VKontakte. The outlet later expanded to become a stand-alone network of reporters covering regional news stories across the country.

Readovka underwent a dramatic shift in editorial policy around the time of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, becoming more ostensibly pro-government in its coverage.

The outlet has more than 2 million subscribers on its Telegram channel.

Readovka said last year that it had undergone a change of ownership. Investigative media identified its new owner as Andrei Tkachenko, a senior figure in the Kremlin-linked nonprofit Dialog.

Readovka said Friday it was cooperating with law enforcement authorities in the criminal case against Kostylev, which it said was not related to its activities.

Meduza reported in 2023 that Kostylev had tried to supply the Russian military with khaki-colored winter coats from China, but authorities in Beijing blocked the shipment to avoid violating Western sanctions.

On Friday, Russian Life stressed that placing Kostylev in pre-trial detention could negatively impact his recovery from injuries he sustained in a motorcycle accident in October 2024.

"Kostylev is disabled... We make an earnest request to choose a lenient measure for Alexei Kostylev that would allow him to receive the necessary medical care," Russian Life wrote.

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