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Suspect Arrested Over Moscow Car Bombing of Pro-Russian Ukrainian PM's Ex-Aide

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The site of a car explosion which wounded Sergei Zavorotniy in Moscow. **REUTERS / Yulia Morozova**

Russian law enforcement authorities said Monday that they had detained a 21-year-old Moscow woman suspected of planting the car bomb that injured a former spokesman for former Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov.

Sergei Zavorotny, 72, was hospitalized in serious condition Friday after an explosive device detonated beneath his SUV while he was driving from his apartment building. Investigators opened a criminal case on charges of attempted murder.

The FSB security service and the Investigative Committee, Russia's top investigative body, both said the arrested woman fell victim to phone scammers earlier this year before being coerced into planting the explosives on behalf of Ukrainian intelligence services.

The scammers posed as bank employees who instructed the woman to transfer a "large sum

of money" to so-called "safe accounts," the Investigative Committee said.

"Subsequently, following instructions from anonymous handlers, she planted an explosive device beneath the undercarriage of Sergei Zavorotny's car. It was detonated remotely," the Investigative Committee added.

Video of the unidentified woman's interrogation shared by state media showed her being told the explosive device was a "GPS tracker" that she was instructed to find in a designated dead drop and install under Zavorotny's vehicle.

"They described it as a small power bank in a bag," the woman, her face blurred, told investigators.

"I saw what happened in the news and then wrote [to the handler] asking them why they lied to me," she added. "They told me 'it's all right.'"

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Investigative Committee spokeswoman Svetlana Petrenko said the agency was working with the woman to establish the circumstances of the attack and identify potential accomplices.

Ukraine has not commented on the bombing.

Zavorotny, a Soviet-era foreign correspondent who later served as Azarov's top aide, moved to Russia following Ukraine's 2014 Maidan Revolution that toppled pro-Kremlin President Viktor Yanukovych.

U.S. intelligence previously identified Zavorotny as an officer in Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), according to a U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee report on Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

In 2019, a Ukrainian court sentenced Yanukovych to 13 years in prison in absentia for treason, and Kyiv later placed sanctions on him and Azarov.

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