

## FSB's Anti-Extremism Department Involved in Serebrennikov Case

August 30, 2017



Director Kirill Serebrennikov Andreev Vladimir / URA.RU / TASS

The Federal Security Services department tasked with protecting Russia from internal threats is overseeing a high-profile embezzlement case against prominent director Kirill Serebrennikov, the RBC outlet <u>reports</u>, citing three unidentified sources.

Serebrennikov was placed under house arrest last week after he was detained by law enforcement and charged with embezzling 68 million rubles (\$1.1 million) in government subsidies as part of a theater project connected to Moscow's Gogol Center.

The FSB's Service to Protect the Constitutional System and Combat Terrorism is "a sub-unit 'specialized' in fighting threats to Russian security in the sociopolitical sphere," its thenhead Gennady Zotov <u>told</u> the Novaya Gazeta newspaper at the time of its founding in the late 90s.

A source close to the Culture Ministry told RBC the FSB's so-called "2nd department" routinely "oversees the ministry's activities."

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Retired special services veteran Alexander Mikhailov confirmed the ⊠claim, saying that the department supervised theaters and museums. ⊠ "Highly qualified specialists work in that department, who understand ⊠culture and art," he was cited as saying.

As part of its work, the FSB branch taps phone conversations, controls written correspondence, inspects ☐ facilities and embeds its own agents in the cultural scene, Mikhailov said.

"Cultural ⊠institutions can be used by the enemy for propaganda purposes, as ⊠structures that form a hostile attitude toward Russia," he was cited as ⊠saying.

Five current and former Gogol Center and Seventh Studio executives, including Serebrennikov, have been implicated in the case.

The case is widely considered to be politically motivated — a claim Russia's Culture Minister has denied.

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