

# Diplomats Hope to Ease Dutch Tensions

By [Christopher Brennan](#)

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**The  Moscow Times**

The Foreign Ministry said Friday that a house managed by the Russian embassy in The Hague was burglarized by unknown assailants, the latest in a series of incidents involving Dutch and Russian diplomats that have ratcheted up tensions between the two nations.

But Dutch police said later Friday that the break-in appeared to be a normal burglary rather than a deliberate targeting of Russian Foreign Ministry employees, and the countries are reportedly already working behind the scenes to ease the bilateral strain, partly in order to preserve lucrative commercial ties.

Russian embassy staff in The Hague returned Thursday to their house, which does not have diplomatic status, and discovered that burglars had broken in and stolen personal items. The Russian Foreign Ministry said Friday that its Dutch counterparts had expressed regret over the incident, and Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans later wrote on Facebook that Dutch police had identified a suspect in the burglary, a person whom Timmermans said was a repeat offender.

The break-in follows an incident last week in which assailants posing as electricians were let into the apartment of Onno Elderenbosch, the second-ranking Dutch diplomat in Moscow, where they beat him, ransacked his belongings and drew the acronym LGBT on a mirror with lipstick along with a heart pierced by an arrow.

The attack was widely believed to be in response to the arrest and reported beating by Dutch police of a Russian diplomat, Dmitry Borodin, at his house in The Hague on Oct. 5, following complaints from neighbors about the treatment of his children. Borodin was released after talking with police for several hours.

President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials denounced the incident as a violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, which prohibits intrusions into the homes of diplomats, and asked their Dutch counterparts to punish those responsible.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte told the Amsterdam-based Telegraaf newspaper Friday that the Netherlands was not considering punishing the police officers who raided the diplomat's house, however.

"That is not an option. It is not going to happen. The police account gives us no reason to do so," Rutte said.

Relations have been further tested by the arrest of activists aboard the Dutch-registered Greenpeace ship Arctic Sunrise in September, when the environmentalists were protesting a Gazprom oil platform in the Pechora Sea off Russia's northern coast. The international group of activists were charged with piracy by a court in Murmansk and face up to 15 years in prison.

Rutte said the Netherlands opposes the charges and is planning to appeal to the United Nations' International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea if the situation is not resolved by Monday, Dutch public broadcaster NOS reported.

Despite the appearance of quickly deteriorating ties, a Kommersant report published Saturday said both sides were looking to re-establish a better diplomatic rapport because of the importance of bilateral trade.

An unidentified Russian Foreign Ministry official told the newspaper that Russian and Dutch diplomats had agreed "to normalize relations as soon as possible," adding: "We are ready for a de-escalation of tensions."

The bilateral feud comes at the end of a year that was supposed to celebrate friendship between the nations to commemorate 400 years of diplomatic relations. Over the course of 2013, dozens of events have been held in each country marking the culture of the other. Most recently, Queen Maxima of the Netherlands attended the opening in Amsterdam on Friday of an exhibit of works by Kazimir Malevich, the Russian avant-garde painter famous for his piece "Black Square."

Maxima's husband, King Willem-Alexander, is scheduled to visit Moscow early next month to officially close the bilateral year, although Dutch parliamentarians are debating whether the trip should be cancelled over the attack on diplomat Elderenbosch. Putin visited

the Netherlands in April.

Contact the author at [c.brennan@imedia.ru](mailto:c.brennan@imedia.ru)

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