

Russia Blames Stockholm for Tit-for-Tat Diplomat Expulsions

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Russia criticized Sweden for allegedly suggesting the diplomatic incident could hurt bilateral ties.

The Russian Foreign Ministry confirmed Tuesday the expulsion of a high-ranking Swedish diplomat in response to a similar move by Sweden, accusing Stockholm of organizing a “provocation” that could lead to a deterioration in relations between the two countries.

“Recently a member of the diplomatic staff at the Swedish Embassy in Moscow was declared persona non grata,” the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The spat is the latest sign of tension between the two countries, which have seen fracturing ties in recent months amid Stockholm's criticism of Russia's role in Ukraine, and alarm among Russia's Baltic neighbors caused by the increased activity of Russian military vessels and planes in the region.

The unnamed Russian diplomat was expelled from Sweden after Russia violated the Vienna

Convention, a code of behavior to which diplomats are expected to adhere, according to Swedish Foreign Office spokesman Johan Tegel, the Reuters news agency reported Monday.

Russia criticized Sweden for allegedly suggesting the diplomatic incident could hurt bilateral ties.

“It is bewildering that the Swedish side, having taken this unfriendly step, is now holding forth about the negative influence on Russian–Swedish relations. Responsibility for the consequences of this provocation rests entirely with Stockholm,” the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

Neither Russia or Sweden specified when the expulsions occurred.

Moscow has stepped up its military presence in the Baltic in the wake of deteriorating relations with European countries over the Ukraine crisis, with the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO) reporting the number of scrambles to intercept foreign jets at its highest level since the Cold War.

Less than a year ago, Sweden carried out its biggest military mobilization for more than 20 years as it gathered troops and ships to search for a submarine it suspected of lurking in its waters. Some media reported that military was searching for a Russian vessel.

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