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Russian Spies Suspected in Plot Against Swiss Chemical Lab, Media Reports

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Andrew Matthews / PA Images / TASS

Two suspected Russian spies were detained earlier this year in the Netherlands over a plot against a Swiss chemical lab testing nerve agents, media reports say.

The Dutch NRC Handelsblad and Tages-Anzeiger newspaper reported Thursday that Swiss, Dutch and British authorities had worked together to foil a plot against the Spiez laboratory near Bern which analyzes chemical and biological weapons.

In a statement to The Moscow Times, a spokesperson for Switzerland's Federal Intelligence Service (FIS), Isabelle Graber, confirmed it had worked with its Dutch and British counterparts in the case.

“The FIS has thus contributed to the prevention of illegal actions against a critical Swiss infrastructure," the statement said.

Unnamed sources close to the investigation told the newspapers that the suspects were in possession of equipment that would allow them to hack into the laboratory. The laboratory also analyzes the Novichok agent which British authorities have said was used to poison ex-spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter earlier this year.

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The Russian Embassy in Bern has dismissed the reports, saying it "considers such false statements simply absurd and nothing other than another attempt to stoke an anti-Russian atmosphere.”

In a written statement to The Moscow Times, the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland confirmed the newspapers’ claim that the two individuals have been under Swiss investigation since March 2017 and their identities are known.

The Dutch intelligence agency, MIVD, did not immediately respond to requests for comment. But the two newspaper reports suggest the two suspected spies were expelled from the Netherlands in March, adding the two suspects were not the same as the two men charged by British prosecutors in the Skripal case last week.

Reuters contributed reporting.

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