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Austria Expels Russian Diplomat Suspected of Industrial Espionage

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Austria is at least the third European country, after Norway and Slovakia, to expel Russian diplomats this month for spying or other crimes. **Ronald Zak / AP / TASS**

Austria has for the first time in its relations with Russia declared a Russian diplomat persona non-grata on suspicion of industrial espionage.

The unnamed diplomat has until Sept. 1 to leave the country, the tabloid Kronen Zeitung reported Monday.

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"The Russian diplomat had carried out economic espionage in a high-tech company for years with the support of an Austrian citizen," Kronen Zeitung wrote without citing sources.

The Russian diplomat reportedly invoked his diplomatic immunity and refused to testify after the Austrian citizen named him as his senior officer during an investigation.

Austria's foreign ministry later confirmed the expulsion, telling the state-run TASS news agency that "the diplomat's behavior contradicts the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations" without providing further details.

Russian lawmakers were quick to condemn the move and the Russian Embassy in Vienna said it expects Moscow to expel an Austrian diplomat in retaliation.

"We're outraged by the groundless decision of the Austrian authorities," a spokesperson for the Russian Embassy in Vienna told TASS. "We're sure that an identical reaction from Moscow won't take long."

Austria is at least the third European country, after Norway and Slovakia, to expel Russian diplomats this month for spying or other crimes. This summer, Austria jailed a retired army colonel for spying for Russia and a Chechen dissident described as Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov's "personal foe" was murdered in Vienna.

Under conservative Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, Austria has positioned itself as one of Russia's closest allies in the European Union.

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