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Russia Expels Austrian Diplomat in Tit-for-Tat Over Espionage Dispute

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The Russian Foreign Ministry building. **Patrick Lauke / Flickr (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)**

Russia has moved swiftly to expel an Austrian diplomat in a tit-for-tat move following the expulsion of its own diplomat from Vienna on accusations of industrial espionage.

Austria gave the unnamed Russian diplomat until Sept. 1 to leave the country, according to Austrian media, for allegedly engaging in economic espionage in a high-tech company for years. An Austrian citizen who reportedly helped him had allegedly identified the Russian diplomat as his senior officer.

Related article: Austria Expels Russian Diplomat Suspected of Industrial Espionage

Russia's Foreign Ministry summoned Austria's Ambassador to Moscow Johannes Aigner to "strongly protest the unjustified decision to revoke the Russian diplomat's accreditation and demand that he leave Austria," it said Monday.

“Guided by the principle of reciprocity, the diplomat of the Embassy of the Republic of Austria in Russia was declared ‘persona non grata’,” it said in a statement.

Russian lawmakers were quick to condemn Austria's move on Monday and the Russian Embassy in Vienna said it had expected Moscow to expel an Austrian diplomat in retaliation.

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

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

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