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Colombia Expels Russian Diplomats on Spying Accusations – Reports

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Colombia has expelled two alleged Russian intelligence officers working under diplomatic protection earlier this month, media reported Tuesday.

Colombian authorities said the Russian diplomats violated the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations but would not detail why they left, according to Reuters. The news agency reported that President Ivan Duque declined to reveal additional information, telling local television it would violate the "principle of continuing bilateral relations."

Colombia's head of migration Juan Francisco Espinosa said the two Russian diplomats had left on Dec. 8 and also declined to explain why.

"Given the circumstances in which these two officials, these two people, left, they cannot return to the country in the short term," Reuters quoted Espionsa as saying.

Citing unnamed sources, Colombia's El Tiempo newspaper and other outlets reported that the

two Russian diplomats were spies tasked with collecting military and economic intelligence. They were said to have an interest in Colombia's energy industry and mineral commodities, and had been attempting to recruit sources in the city of Cali.

The publication identified the men as Alexander Paristov and Alexander Belousov, both of whom had allegedly been in Colombia for more than two years. Colombia's W Radio station reported, also citing unnamed government sources, that Paristov is an alleged member of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) and the second diplomat a member of the GRU military intelligence agency.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said Wednesday it declared two Colombian diplomats "persona non grata" in response to the expulsion.

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