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Romania to Expel Russian Diplomat in Solidarity with Prague

By AFP

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Nikolai Morozov / TASS

Romania said Monday it will expel a Russian diplomat, the latest European country to do so in solidarity with the Czech Republic, which is involved in a spat with Moscow.

The deputy military attache at the Russian embassy in Bucharest, Alexei Grichayev, would be declared "persona non grata... in view of his activities and actions contrary to the Convention of Vienna on diplomatic relations," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Romania's foreign minister Bogdan Aurescu summoned Russian ambassador Valery Kuzmin to his offices on Monday, according to the statement.

The Czech government has accused the Russian secret services of being behind an explosion that killed two people at an arms depot in eastern Czech Republic in 2014, which President Milos Zeman on Sunday likened to terror attacks.

After Prague expelled 18 Russian diplomats over the allegations, Moscow retaliated by kicking out 20 Czech embassy staff, sending bilateral relations to their lowest point in decades.

On Tuesday, Czech Interior Minister Jan Hamacek asked his partners in the European Union and NATO to expel Russian diplomats in solidarity, leading neighboring Slovakia as well as the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to announce they would expel a total of seven Russian diplomats.

"Any accusations of Russia in the context of the various events in the Czech Republic is completely unfounded," Kremlin spokesperson Dimitri Peskov told reporters on Monday, adding that the accusations were "without evidence" and caused "extreme harm" to bilateral relations.

Zeman, however, said Sunday that he could see no reason why "there should be 18 spies" at the Russian embassy in Prague.

The alleged agents of Russia's GRU military secret service are the same ones suspected of poisoning former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, England in 2018.

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