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Russia Expels Estonian Consul Over Alleged Espionage

By AFP

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Russia on Wednesday expelled Estonia's consul in St. Petersburg for allegedly receiving classified documents, the latest in a series of mutual diplomatic expulsions between Russia and the West over espionage claims in recent months.

The FSB security service said Tuesday it had detained consul Mart Latte while he was receiving classified documents from a Russian national and would take measures against him in accordance with international law.

Related article: Estonian Consul Held in Russia Over 'Classified Documents'

In a statement on Wednesday, Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Latte had been declared "persona non grata" and would have to leave Russia within 48 hours.

She added that Moscow had "lodged a strong protest" with the Estonian embassy in Russia against Latte's "intelligence gathering activities."

On Tuesday, Estonian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Aari Lemmik told AFP that the FSB had charged Latte with "embezzling sensitive materials."

She called the charges "completely ungrounded" and described his arrest as "a provocation by Russian authorities."

Since the start of the year, Russia and Western countries have engaged in a series of diplomatic expulsions and mutual espionage claims as tensions have spiraled.

Related article: Russia, Ukraine Expel Diplomats as Tensions Soar

In April, Moscow ordered a Ukrainian consul in St. Petersburg to leave Russia after the FSB said it had caught him attempting to receive classified information from a Russian national.

That month Moscow also expelled four diplomats from the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in a tit-for-tat response to a wave of expulsions of Russian diplomats in central and eastern Europe.

The Baltic states, which were ruled by Moscow during the Soviet era, are among the fiercest international critics of Russia.

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