

Dutch Expel Russian Diplomats, Close Trade Mission

By [AFP](#)

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The Russian embassy in the Hague **Vitaly Chugin / TASS**

The Dutch Foreign Ministry on Saturday announced the expulsion of several Russian diplomats and the closure of Russia's trade mission in Amsterdam, accusing Moscow of using diplomatic cover for spying.

It was the latest development in a dispute over Russia's failure to grant visas to Dutch diplomats to staff their embassy in Moscow and the consulate in St. Petersburg.

Because of the lack of staff, the consulate will close on Monday, though the embassy will stay open, the statement added.

The Netherlands had repeatedly tried to find a solution to the dispute, said the ministry statement.

"Russia's continued attempts to place intelligence officers into the Netherlands under

diplomatic cover are unacceptable," Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra [tweeted](#) later Saturday.

"That is why we are limiting the number of Russian diplomats in the Netherlands."

The Russian diplomats being told to leave have two weeks to depart the country, while Russia's trade mission in Amsterdam had to be closed from Tuesday, said the ministry statement.

Hoekstra told Dutch broadcaster NOS that he expected around a dozen Russian diplomats would have to leave the country.

The shutdown of Russia's trade mission was "a response to the continued violations of international human rights" by Moscow, Hoekstra said in a separate letter to parliament.

It will remain closed "until the Russian federation stops its violation of the prohibition against attacks on civilian populations and structures" in Ukraine, he said.

MH17 airline deaths

Russia's military offensive in Ukraine has led to a wave of international condemnation and sanctions backed by the expulsion of hundreds of Russian diplomats from Western nations, some accused of spying.

Moscow has responded by sending home dozens of Western diplomats.

The Netherlands expelled 17 Russian diplomats shortly after the invasion of Ukraine in February last year, leaving 58 in the country before Saturday's announcement, according to Dutch media reports.

In response, Russia expelled 15 Dutch diplomats, and since then talks on naming new diplomats to each country have failed, the Dutch government said.

As a result, "the Russian embassy in The Hague will not be able to have more diplomats than the Dutch embassy in Moscow," it said.

Tensions between the two countries had already been high over the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine in 2014. The plane, flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, had 196 Dutch citizens aboard.

International investigators said this month that there were "strong indications" that Russian President Vladimir Putin personally approved the supply of the missile that shot it down.

Last year, a Dutch court convicted two Russians and a Ukrainian in absentia over the downing of MH17, though Russia has denied any involvement in the firing of the missile.

Dutch media reported that the Dutch ambassador to Russia was summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry earlier this week, as Moscow demanded that the Netherlands end its "obsessive" attempts to blame Russia for the disaster.

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