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Russia Shutters Swedish Consulate, Expels Diplomats

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The Russian consulate general in Gothenburg, Sweden. **gothenburg.mid.ru**

Russia will expel five Swedish diplomats in a tit-for-tat move, the Russian Foreign Ministry announced Thursday as tensions persisted over allegations of Russian spying and Stockholm's bid to join NATO in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

"The Swedish ambassador was informed that Russia reciprocated by declaring five Swedish diplomats 'personae non grata'," it said in a statement.

The Foreign Ministry said it ordered the diplomats, three of whom staffed the Swedish Embassy's defense attaché, to leave Russia over the same unspecified time period as the Russian diplomats who were expelled from Sweden.

Sweden announced the expulsion of five Russian diplomats on accusations of espionage in April as Nordic broadcasters released joint investigative documentaries on Russian spying activities in the region.

Related article: Sweden Says Expelling 5 Russian Diplomats

Russia's Foreign Ministry said it will also shutter Sweden's consulate in St. Petersburg and close down Russia's consulate in Gothenburg at the same time on Sept. 1.

Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom lamented the Russian decision as "very regrettable."

"Russia has chosen to expel Swedish diplomats who have acted within the framework of the Vienna Convention and conducted customary diplomatic activities in Russia," Billstrom said in a statement.

The foreign minister also deplored the closure of the Swedish consulate in St. Petersburg, describing it as "a driving force in the bilateral people-to-people cooperation between Russia and Sweden."

"Today's decision is therefore a further confirmation of the negative political developments in Russia and the country's international isolation," he said.

Sweden and its neighbor Finland both ended decades of military non-alignment in May 2022 when they decided to join the NATO alliance in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Sweden and Finland's accession would double the size of Russia's border with NATO.

Sweden's bid has run into opposition from Hungary and Turkey after a litany of diplomatic spats.

Stockholm still hopes to join the bloc before the next NATO summit in Vilnius in July.

Russia's ambassador to Stockholm had warned that Sweden would become a "legitimate target" of Moscow's "retaliatory measures" if it joined NATO, prompting a stern response from Stockholm about interference in its security policy.

AFP contributed reporting.

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