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Two Germans Face Trial in Russian Spying Case

By AFP

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Wagner mercenaries in southern Russia's Rostov-on-Don. **Erik Romanenko / TASS**

Two German men will face trial in Berlin on Wednesday for allegedly stealing intelligence secrets and passing them on to Russia's security services.

The pair, named by prosecutors as Carsten L. and Arthur E., are accused of working together with a Russian businessman to "procure sensitive information" from the portfolio of Germany's BND foreign intelligence.

Prosecutors did not reveal the nature of the leaked documents, but Spiegel magazine reported that they were related to the BND's efforts to surveil the Wagner paramilitary group, which fought alongside Russia's regular troops in Ukraine.

If found guilty of high treason, the suspects could be jailed for life.

Carsten L., an employee of the BND, is alleged to have passed documents from the agency to

Arthur E. who in turn handed them to a contact in Russia, according to prosecutors.

Between September and October 2022, Carsten L. is said to have printed out or took screenshots of nine internal BND files.

The documents were transferred to Arthur E., who allegedly carried digital copies to Moscow, printed them out and turned them over to Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB).

The information was classified and leaking it posed a serious risk to German security, prosecutors said.

The FSB is said to have paid Carsten L. at least 450,000 euros ($485,500) and Arthur E. at least 400,000 euros, with Arthur E. picking up the payments in cash from Moscow.

Wagner chat

According to the Spiegel report, German intelligence had reportedly managed to gain access to a messaging app used by Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner mercenary group.

But traffic in the chat is said to have dried up after the information was passed to Moscow, depriving Germany and its allies of vital information on the status of Russia's campaign in Ukraine, the magazine said.

The Wagner group was brought to heel by the Kremlin after Prigozhin led an armed rebellion against Russia's military leadership in June.

Many Wagner fighters were subsequently integrated into the regular army, while Prigozhin himself was killed in an air crash in August.

But at the time of the leak, Wagner mercenaries played a prominent role in Russia's war effort.

According to Spiegel, Arthur E. was recruited to work with the BND after a chance meeting with Carsten L. in early 2021.

Arthur E.'s contacts in business and politics in Africa, thanks to his work as a diamond dealer, made him an attractive associate for German intelligence.

Espionage work

In September 2022, Arthur E. introduced Carsten L. to a Russian business acquaintance with contacts in the Russian security services immediately before the leak is said to have happened, according to the Spiegel report.

Carsten L. was arrested in December 2022 and his alleged accomplice was detained a month later as he arrived at Munich airport from the United States. The pair were charged in September.

Germany has been shaken by several cases of alleged spying for Russia since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in early 2022.

In June, the BfV German domestic security agency warned against the risk of an "aggressive Russian espionage operation" as Moscow continues to wage war on Ukraine.

Earlier this year, a German national working for the military was arrested on suspicion of spying for Russia.

And in November 2022, a German man was handed a suspended sentence for passing information to Russian intelligence services while working as a reserve officer for the German army.

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