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New Searches at EU Parliament in Russia Meddling Probe

By AFP

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European Parliament / flickr

Investigators on Wednesday searched the home and offices of an EU parliament staffer as part of an investigation into suspected Russian interference and corruption, the Belgian state prosecutor's office said.

According to a source close to the investigation, the target of the raids is Guillaume Pradoura, a former assistant to embattled EU lawmaker Maximilian Krah of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.

Pradoura, who was expelled from France's National Rally over an anti-Semitic picture, now works for the Dutch far-right lawmaker Marcel de Graaff.

The Belgian prosecutor's office said searches were being conducted at a staffer's home in Schaerbeek, northeast Brussels, as well as at his offices in Brussels and Strasbourg — with

cooperation from French authorities.

In a statement, the law enforcement body said the "searches are part of an investigation into interference, passive corruption and membership in a criminal organization."

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The searches "concern evidence of Russian interference, indicating that members of the European Parliament were approached and paid to promote Russian propaganda via the news site Voice of Europe," the prosecutor's office added.

"Evidence suggests that the European Parliament staffer in question played an important role in this case," it said.

Belgian prosecutors last month opened a probe into the meddling allegations after Czech intelligence services exposed a network suspected of using EU lawmakers to spread Kremlin propaganda.

The claims centered on Voice of Europe, which has since been banned under EU sanctions.

EU lawmakers face strict rules regarding independence and ethics, and they can face penalties if they violate them.

Belgium says its own intelligence services have determined that some lawmakers were paid to promote Russian propaganda.

Pradoura's former boss Krah is being investigated for suspicious links to both Russia and China, and another of Krah's parliament aides was arrested on suspicion of spying for China.

The snowballing scandals surrounding Krah led his AfD party to be expelled last week from its group in the EU parliament, the far-right Identity and Democracy.

But he remains the AfD's top candidate in the June 6-9 European election since it is too late to remove him from the position.

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