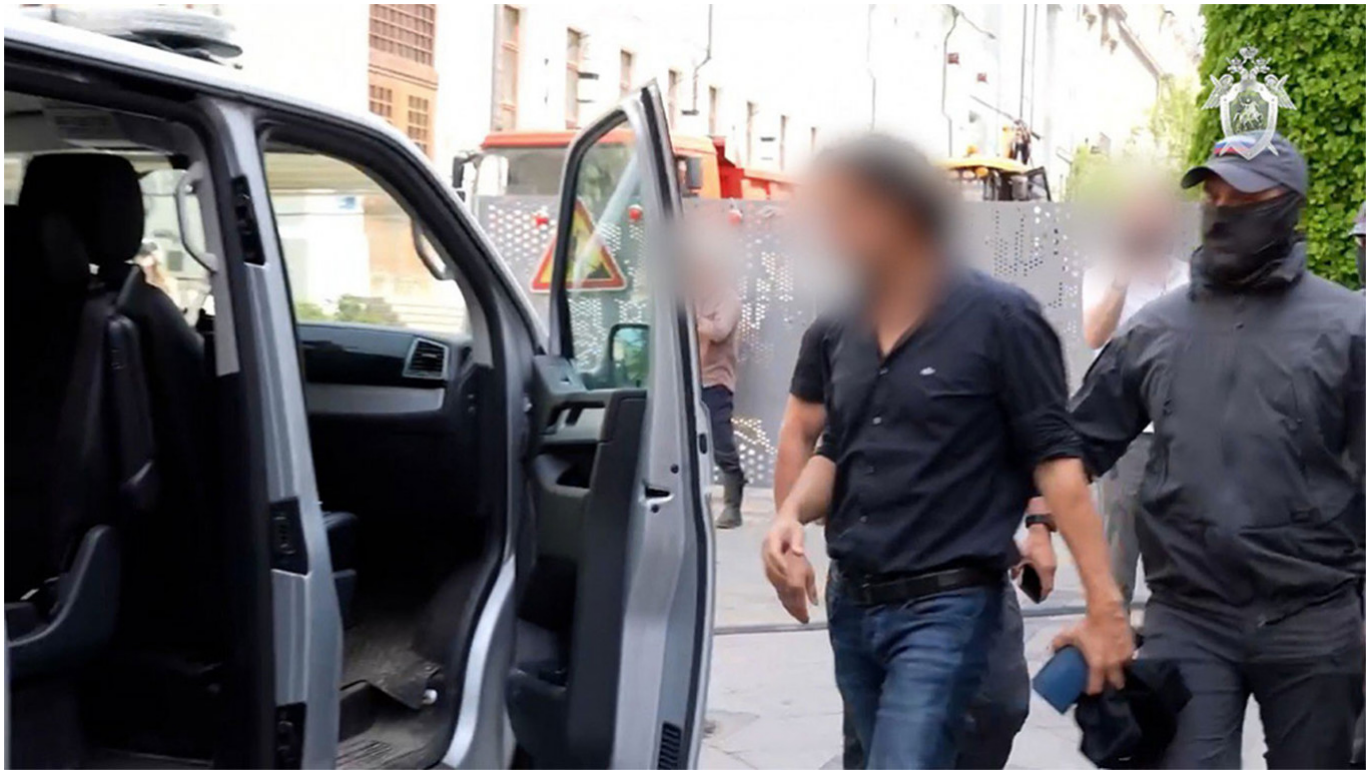
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Russia Detains French Citizen for Gathering Military Information

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Video of the French citizen being arrested. **Russian Investigative Committee**

Russian law enforcement authorities on Thursday detained a French citizen on suspicion of gathering information about the military and charged him with violating the country's law on "foreign agents."

"The suspect carried out a targeted collection of Russian defense and military-technical information for several years," Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said in a statement. State media, citing police, later identified the man as Laurent Vinatier.

"To this end, he repeatedly visited the territory of Russia, including the city of Moscow, where he held meetings with citizens of the Russian Federation," the law enforcement body added.

In a video released by investigators, masked agents could be seen approaching Vinatier — whose face is blurred — at a restaurant and escorting him away. The video later cuts to him being brought into an Investigative Committee building.

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Investigators claimed the French man collected materials "with the intention of not meeting the requirement under Russian law to submit documents needed to be added in the 'foreign agent' registry."

Vinatier, who holds a PhD in political science, is an employee of the Geneva-based Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, which "works to prevent and resolve armed conflicts around the world through mediation and discreet diplomacy."

The organization told AFP it was trying to secure his release.

"We are aware that Laurent Vinatier, an advisor at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, has been detained in Russia," it said in a statement. "We are working to get more details of the circumstances and to secure Laurent's release."

The French Foreign Ministry said it was aware of the arrest of the French citizen and said its Moscow embassy had requested consular protection for him and also more details from the Russian authorities.

"It is one of our citizens working for a Swiss NGO... it was in no way someone who was working for France," President Emmanuel Macron told French television in an interview Thursday evening. "We will follow this closely and he will receive all consular protection."

The French national faces up to five years in prison on charges of breaking Russia's "foreign agents" law. He does not appear to be facing charges of espionage, according to the Investigative Committee's statement.

The arrest came the day after the French authorities said they arrested a 26-year-old man from eastern Ukraine's Donbas region on suspicion of trying to make explosives and planning a violent act.

AFP contributed reporting.

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