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Moscow Court Rules To Keep French Researcher Laurent Vinatier in Jail

By AFP

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Laurent Vinatier in court. **Vladimir Gerdo / TASS**

A Moscow court ruled Thursday to keep French researcher Laurent Vinatier in pre-trial detention. Vinatier was arrested last month and accused of gathering military information.

The 47-year-old works for a Swiss conflict mediation NGO and in early June became the latest Westerner to be arrested in Russia having been charged with breaching Moscow's "foreign agents" law.

Russia's security services accuse him of collecting military information and his arrest came as tensions between Moscow and Paris escalated over Ukraine.

The Moscow City Court on Thursday rejected Vinatier's appeal request to be placed under house arrest. He said this would allow him to support his wife and school-aged children.

Vinatier appeared in court via video link, wearing a black T-shirt and sitting behind bars,

speaking accented Russian and visibly emotional.

"I will try to speak Russian. I am an analyst, a researcher, a writer ... I always wanted to adequately present the interest and position of Russia on international relations in my work," he said.

"I love Russia, my wife is Russian, my life is linked with Russia," he told the court, adding: "I do not understand why I am here."

French President Emmanuel Macron has demanded his release and the French consul general in Moscow was present at the hearing.

A court last month ruled to keep Vinatier in detention until August 5.

Vinatier is an adviser with the Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and a veteran researcher of Russia and other post-Soviet countries.

Russia has arrested several Westerners during its Ukraine offensive, which ruptured ties with the West.

Moscow has held U.S. journalist Evan Gershkovich on espionage charges he denies since March last year.

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