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Moscow Court Extends French Researcher's Detention Until Feb. 21

By AFP

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Laurent Vinatier. **Sofya Sandurskaya / TASS**

A Moscow court on Tuesday extended the detention of a French researcher accused of gathering information about the Russian military and violating the country's laws on "foreign agents."

Laurent Vinatier, who worked for a Swiss conflict mediation NGO before he was arrested in Moscow in June, faces up to five years in prison if convicted of the charges against him.

At the opening of the trial in Moscow's Zamoskvoretsky court on Tuesday, a judge ruled to extend Vinatier's detention until Feb. 21, 2025. The judge also set the next hearing in the case for Sept. 16, AFP journalists reported from the courtroom, granting Vinatier's request for more time to prepare.

In previous hearings, he admitted to violating Russian law and apologized.

Investigators say the 48-year-old French citizen collected military information that could be used against Russia by foreign states. Under Russian law, anybody who gathers or shares material on Russia's military or security services must register with the authorities as a "foreign agent."

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French authorities have urged Russia to release Vinatier, saying he has been "arbitrarily detained."

Vinatier, who holds a PhD in political science, is an adviser with the Geneva-based Center for Humanitarian Dialogue and a researcher on Russia and other post-Soviet countries.

According to sources interviewed by AFP, the Frenchman had been working for years on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, before Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Humanitarian Dialogue said in June that it was doing "everything possible to help" Vinatier, who "lives in Switzerland and travels regularly for his work."

Married and a father of four children, he has been in pre-trial detention since his arrest, with his repeated requests to be placed under house arrest rejected.

"I always wanted to adequately present the interest and position of Russia on international relations in my work," he said at a hearing in early July. "I love Russia, my wife is Russian, my life is linked with Russia."

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