

Russian Court Hands French Researcher 3-Year Prison Sentence for Breaking 'Foreign Agent' Law

By [AFP](#)

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Laurent Vinatier at a hearing at the Zamoskvoretsky District Court. **Yulia Morozova / TASS**

A Moscow court on Monday sentenced French researcher Laurent Vinatier to three years in prison for breaking Russia's laws on "foreign agents."

Vinatier, a 48-year-old researcher working for a Swiss conflict mediation NGO, was arrested in Moscow in June and charged with gathering information on Russia's military without being registered as a "foreign agent," a crime punishable by up to five years in prison.

A prosecutor told the court Monday that Vinatier should be found guilty and serve three years and three months in a penal colony. Vinatier, who listened with his head bowed, has admitted to breaking the law, claiming he was unaware of the requirement to register as a "foreign agent."

Wearing jeans and a pale blue shirt, Vinatier appeared weary but delivered a final statement in Russian, even quoting the poet Alexander Pushkin. "I agree with the charge fully. I fully admit guilt," he said, asking the court for a lenient sentence.

Judge Natalya Cheprasova at Moscow's Zamoskvoretsky District Court read out the final verdict later on Monday, ruling to "find Vinatier guilty... and set a punishment in the form of three years imprisonment at a penal colony."

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Earlier, the state prosecutor acknowledged Vinatier's admission of guilt and remorse but also cited "significant threats to Russia's security" in justifying the requested sentence.

Vinatier's lawyer, Oleg Bessonov, called the request "extremely harsh" and urged the judge to impose a fine instead. "Our client committed a crime for the first time in Russia and has fully admitted his guilt," Bessonov said.

Russia's "foreign agent" law, frequently used to target Kremlin critics, is rarely applied to foreign nationals. The law was expanded in 2022 to require individuals who gather information on Russia's military and defense sector that could harm national security to register as "foreign agents."

French President Emmanuel Macron has called for Vinatier's release, dismissing the charges as propaganda and asserting they "do not match reality."

Russia did not charge Vinatier with espionage, nor did it publicly accuse him of spying. The Frenchman works as an adviser with the Geneva-based Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, a non-governmental organization that focuses on mediating and resolving armed conflicts through diplomacy.

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