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French Researcher Jailed in Russia Now Faces Espionage Charges

By AFP

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Laurent Vinatier. **Yulia Morozova / TASS**

A French researcher who is serving a three-year prison sentence in Russia is now under investigation for possible spying, according to court documents seen by AFP on Wednesday.

Filings show that Laurent Vinatier is scheduled to appear in court on Aug. 25 as part of an espionage case, charges that carry a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

Vinatier, who worked for a Switzerland-based conflict mediation organization, is just one of several Westerners who have been arrested in Russia amid heightened tensions over the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The French government has demanded that Russian authorities release him and accused Moscow of taking Westerners hostage.

Vinatier was jailed last October on allegations that he gathered information on the Russian

military and violated the country's "foreign agent" law by not registering in a Russian government database.

Vinatier worked as an adviser at the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue and is a veteran researcher on Russia and other post-Soviet countries.

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