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French National Arrested in Russia's Far East, Diplomatic Sources Say

By AFP

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Sofiane Sehili. **Personal Archive / Instagram**

A French national was arrested in Russia's Far East and placed in pre-trial detention, French diplomatic sources told AFP on Monday.

The sources did not specify the date or circumstances of the arrest, but said the French Consulate in Moscow had requested consular access.

French media identified the man as Sofiane Sehili, 44, an ultra-endurance cyclist who had sought to set a record crossing Europe.

Le Monde reported on Friday that he was arrested in the Pacific port city of Vladivostok on suspicion of illegally crossing the border. The state-run TASS news agency, citing local authorities, confirmed that account.

On his personal website, Sehili describes himself as an ultra-endurance racer and adventure

cyclist based in southwestern France.

“I live and breathe for cycling,” he wrote. “A pure and unaltered passion that has shaped my life for the past fifteen years.”

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The case comes more than a year after another French national, Laurent Vinatier, who is a researcher with a Swiss conflict mediation group, was arrested in Russia and later convicted under the country’s “foreign agents” law.

France condemned the arrest of Vinatier as politically motivated. Russian authorities have since signaled they may pursue additional espionage charges against him, which carry a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

France and the U.S. have accused Moscow of engaging in “hostage diplomacy” by arresting foreign nationals on spurious charges to use them in prisoner exchanges for Russians jailed in the West.

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