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French and Russian Officials in Talks About Jailed Researcher Vinatier, Kremlin Confirms

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French researcher Laurent Vinatier. **Maxim Shipenkov / EPA / TASS**

The Kremlin said Thursday that it had made a "proposal" to France regarding Laurent Vinatier, a French researcher jailed in Russia and facing espionage charges that could carry a sentence of up to 20 years in prison.

"We have made contact with the French about this. Indeed, a proposal was made to the French regarding Vinatier," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, without providing details. "The ball is now in France's court."

Vinatier, who works for a Swiss conflict-mediation organization, was arrested in June 2024 and later sentenced to three years in prison for failing to register as a "foreign agent." Prosecutors have since brought additional charges accusing him of espionage.

President Vladimir Putin said last week that he would look into the case after being asked

about Vinatier by a French journalist during his annual televised news conference.

“I don’t know anything about this case. This is the first I’ve heard of it,” Putin told the journalist. “But I promise I will find out. And if there is even the slightest chance of resolving this matter favorably, if Russian law allows it, we will make every effort.”

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Vinatier is among a number of Western nationals who have been arrested in Russia since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

During court hearings in his original case, Vinatier, a longtime Russia expert, said he had not known he was required to register under the “foreign agents” law. He apologized and said that through his work, he had sought to represent Russia’s interests in international affairs.

Rights groups and independent observers say Russian authorities have increasingly used alleged violations of the “foreign agents” law as a pretext for arresting individuals before pursuing more serious criminal charges.

AFP contributed reporting.

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