The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Moscow Vows Response as Germany Expels Russian Alleged Spy Handler

By Bryan Stole for AFP and Antoine Lambroschini for AFP

January 22, 2026



The Russian Embassy in Berlin. **Joerg Carstensen / dpa / TASS**

Germany summoned Russia's ambassador Thursday and ordered the expulsion of a Russian diplomat suspected of being the handler of a woman arrested the previous day on espionage charges.

"The German government will not tolerate espionage in Germany — especially not under the guise of diplomatic status," the German Foreign Ministry said on X.

"Today we summoned the Russian ambassador and informed him of the expulsion of the individual in question who spied on behalf of Russia," the ministry said, referring to the alleged handler inside the embassy.

Russia's war in Ukraine has sharply heightened tensions between Moscow and NATO member Germany, which strongly backs Kyiv and also accuses Russia of drone surveillance, sabotage

and disinformation campaigns.

The Russian Embassy in a statement to AFP called the allegations "a ridiculous, hastily concocted provocation" and added: "We made it clear that Berlin's unfriendly actions would not go unanswered."

News of the case broke Wednesday when police in Berlin arrested the alleged spy, a German-Ukrainian businesswoman partly identified as Ilona W.

She allegedly used her contacts with current and former German Defense Ministry employees to gather information about military aid for Ukraine, drone test sites and the arms industry.

She is also accused of helping her Russian handler use a fake identity to attend political events in Berlin and build useful contacts.

According to news magazine Der Spiegel, her handler was an officer in Russia's GRU military intelligence service whose diplomatic cover was the post of deputy military attache.

Der Spiegel partly identified him as Andrei M. and reported that Berlin had now ordered him to leave the country within 72 hours.

'Hostile act'

German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul, speaking during a visit to Ethiopia, said: "We have made it clear that this is a hostile act and that intelligence activities in our country are completely unacceptable, especially under the guise of diplomacy.

"The individual in question at the Russian Embassy has been declared persona non grata with immediate effect," he added.

"This shows that we are monitoring Russia's actions very closely and that we are taking action against them. Russia's aggressive actions have consequences."

The woman arrested on spying charges faced a judge on Thursday who ordered her remanded in custody.

She was known in political and business circles as part of an association that has been advocating international cooperation for years, particularly on subjects related to Russia or Ukraine, according to an AFP source who knew her in this context.

However, the source described her influence as quite limited.

The source, however, said she was introduced into circles around the Petersburger Dialog, a once-prominent German-Russian discussion forum founded in 2001.

The forum lost importance and eventually disappeared as German-Russian relations soured amid growing repression of civil society in Russia and the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

A Defense Ministry spokesman confirmed on Wednesday that two former German military officials remained under investigation for allegedly providing Ilona W. with sensitive official

information.

Both men — a recently retired staff officer and a former senior civil servant — are believed to have used their contacts in the German Armed Forces to supply sensitive information to Ilona W., the spokesman said.

But whether they knew the information was being passed along to Russian intelligence is part of the ongoing investigation, he said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/01/22/moscow-vows-response-as-germany-expels-russian-alleged-spy-handler-a91756