Russia's FSB Says Arrested French Citizen Was Collecting Military Information

By [AFP](#)

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Laurent Vinatier. **Vladimir Gerdo / TASS**

Russia's FSB security service said Wednesday that a French citizen arrested in Moscow last month was collecting military information that could be used by foreign intelligence agencies to harm Russia.

Laurent Vinatier, a researcher with a Swiss conflict mediation NGO, was arrested on charges of breaching Russia's "foreign agents" law in June, the latest case of a Western citizen detained in Russia amid its offensive on Ukraine.

The FSB said Vinatier had "collected information of a military and military-technical nature that could be used to the detriment of the security of the Russian Federation."

Their statement mirrors accusations previously leveled by Russia's Investigative Committee, though the public involvement of the FSB, Russia's counter-intelligence agency, could elevate Western concerns over the case.

Russia has not charged or publicly accused Vinatier of working with any foreign intelligence agencies or directly engaging in espionage.

But authorities have previously arrested people for breaching the "foreign agents" law before hitting them with more serious charges.

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In a separate statement, the Investigative Committee said on Wednesday that Vinatier had pleaded guilty to the charges, which carry a five-year sentence, after he had apologized in a court hearing last month.

The FSB said Wednesday it had audio recordings of meetings Vinatier held with Russian citizens in which he was allegedly collecting the military information.

Under Russian law, people who collect, report or share information related to Russia's military or security services are required to register as "foreign agents."

The law has also been used widely to target domestic critics of the Kremlin, with hundreds of journalists and activists labeled "foreign agents," a designation which carries Soviet-era espionage connotations.

French President Emmanuel Macron demanded the immediate release of Vinatier after his arrest, saying the "propaganda" against him "does not match reality."

U.S.-Russian journalist Alsu Kurmasheva was arrested last year on charges of failing to register as a "foreign agent," before more serious allegations of spreading false information about the armed forces were leveled against her.

And last month a closed-door trial of Evan Gershkovich, a U.S. reporter arrested in March 2023 and charged with espionage, opened in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg.

His employer, The Wall Street Journal, slammed it as a "sham." The paper, the White House and Gershkovich have all rejected the charges as baseless and Russia has not provided any evidence of the accusations against him.

Washington has accused Moscow of arresting foreign citizens to hold them as bargaining chips in exchange for Russians jailed abroad.

A court last month ordered Vinatier held in pre-trial detention until at least Aug. 5.

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