

Beat: Politics

Russian embassy flat burglary adds to Russian-Dutch diplomatic tensions

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USPA News - A Russian embassy flat in the Dutch city of The Hague was broken into on Thursday evening, officials said on Friday, just days after a senior Dutch diplomat was attacked by unknown assailants in Moscow and a Russian diplomat was illegally arrested in The Hague. The latest incident occurred on Thursday evening at a residence that is managed by the nearby Russian embassy but has no diplomatic status, even though it is used by embassy employees.

Several "personal belongings" of the resident - who is on vacation - were taken during the burglary, a police spokesperson said. "There has been no vandalism and no slogans have been left behind," Dutch police said in a statement. "The burglary fits in terms of modus operandi in the image police have of other recent burglaries in this part of the city. The burglar or burglars entered the residence through the front door without causing damage." Officers examined the scene on late Thursday evening and will continue their investigation in cooperation with the Russian embassy, police said. No arrests had been made as of Friday afternoon but investigators indicated they believed it was an "ordinary burglary," meaning it did not target the Russians in particular. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said the burglary was discovered by embassy employees when they returned to their apartments on Thursday evening. "The apartment is occupied by an employee of the embassy's administrative-technical staff who is currently on vacation," he said. Lukashevich added: "The incident was immediately reported to the competent authorities of the host country. Police arrived quickly at the scene and began their investigation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, represented by Minister Frans Timmermans, expressed regret at what happened." The ministry spokesman added that it expects Dutch authorities will take "exhaustive measures" to identify those responsible for the break-in. Thursday's incident is the latest incident during Russian-Dutch Bilateral Year to celebrate the longstanding relationship between the two countries. Earlier this week, a senior Dutch diplomat was beaten by unknown assailants posing as electricians when he returned home to his fourth-floor apartment in the Russian capital. The diplomat, identified as embassy deputy chief Onno Elderenbosch, had been forced to take the stairs after noticing the elevator in the building was not working. He was met by two men posing as electricians who wanted to check if the electricity was working in his apartment. Once Elderenbosch opened the door to his apartment, the men pushed him inside and knocked him to the floor before using duct tape to restrain him. He was slightly injured but did not seek medical attention. Vladimir Markin, a spokesman for Russia's Investigative Committee, said the attackers ransacked the apartment before fleeing the scene. The unidentified men also used lipstick to draw a heart symbol pierced with an arrow on a mirror in the hallway, accompanied by the letters "LGBT" which refers to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. The Dutch government is a strong supporter of LGBT rights and previously criticized Russia for its stance on the issue, which includes a controversial ban on LGBT "propaganda." Earlier this month, days before the assault in Moscow, Russian president Vladimir Putin demanded an apology from the Netherlands after Dutch police briefly detained a Russian diplomat at his apartment in The Hague over concerns from neighbors who believed the diplomat's children were being maltreated. The Dutch government apologized to Russia last week for violating the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, saying the Russian diplomat enjoyed full immunity and inviolability. "At the same time I have a personal understanding for the actions of the officers involved, who acted from their professional responsibility for a situation they encountered," Timmermans said. Relations between the two countries were already strained by the detention of 30 Greenpeace activists in Russia last month. The Dutch government launched legal action earlier this month to free the activists, two of them Dutch citizens, who were charged with piracy after using a Netherlands-flagged Greenpeace ship during a protest on an Arctic oil rig.

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