Dutch police arrest man for Russian embassy flat break-in

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USPA News - Police in the Dutch city of The Hague have arrested a man accused of breaking into a Russian embassy flat last week, taking a number of personal items, officials said on Thursday. The burglary added to diplomatic tensions between Russia and the Netherlands after a series of incidents.

The 43-year-old man, whose identity was not immediately released, was arrested on late Wednesday evening during a coordinated police operation at a public venue in The Hague. Officials from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the Russian embassy of the arrest, a police spokesperson said. The suspect was identified through fingerprints that were found at the embassy flat. "This man turns out to have been involved with police and the justice system in connection with burglaries and trespassing," a police statement said, adding that the suspect is expected to make an initial court appearance on Friday. The incident occurred on the evening of October 17 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 was on vacation - were taken during the burglary. "There has been no vandalism and no slogans have been left behind," Dutch police said in a statement last week. "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 after the break-in and quickly indicated that it was likely an "ordinary burglary," meaning those responsible did not target the Russian diplomats in particular. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said the apartment is occupied by an employee of the embassy`s administrative-technical staff who was on vacation at the time. Lukashevich said the burglary was discovered by embassy employees when they returned to their apartments at night, but noted that police officers arrived quickly at the scene. Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans expressed "regret" at the incident, while Lukashevich emphasized his government expected Dutch authorities to take "exhaustive measures" to identify those responsible. The break-in was the latest incident during Russian-Dutch Bilateral Year to celebrate the longstanding relationship between the two countries. Earlier that same 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 soon apologized to Russia 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. Those charges have since been reduced.

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