

Probe of US-based Turk hacker leads to Austrian intel fight

February 28 2017, by George Jahn

Austria's intelligence services on Tuesday confirmed a news report that they have tracked down a U.S.-based Turkish hacker who attacked several government websites.

The report in the daily Kurier cited the military intelligence service as saying that a Turkish activist directed the attacks from his home in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

The man, identified as Arslan A. and by other aliases, reportedly targeted the Vienna airport and the websites of the defense and foreign ministries, the national bank and parliament late last year and early this year. While most of the attacks were unsuccessful, the defense ministry web page was shut down for several hours.

The report also says the man also tried to hack sites in other countries that he considered hostile to Turkey.

Bilateral relations are tense over strong Austrian criticism of Turkey's human-rights record, Austria's opposition to EU membership for Ankara and Turkish complaints that Austria discriminates against Muslims.

The investigation also shed light on professional rivalries between the two Austrian agencies that might have hurt the investigation.

In an emailed statement to The Associated Press, the Federal Office for Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism complained

Tuesday of a "premature publication" which it says compromised efforts to build a strong case.

An Interior Ministry official familiar with the case said Interior Minister Wolfgang Sobotka was furious about the military's role.

The official said the leak, from the military intelligence agency, foiled domestic intelligence plans to catch the hacker in the act.

The official also told The Associated Press that the Interior Ministry feels the military had no business getting involved because the hack attempts did not threaten national security.

A senior military official declined comment beyond confirming the accuracy of the newspaper report.

Both officials demanded anonymity because they were not authorized to comment on intelligence issues.

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