

Czechs extradite alleged Russian hacker to US

March 30 2018, by Karel Janicek

The Czech Republic extradited a Russian man to the U.S. to face charges of hacking computers at LinkedIn, Dropbox and other American companies, an official said Friday.

Yevgeniy Nikulin was flown to the U.S. overnight, Justice Ministry spokeswoman Tereza Schejbalova said.

Nikulin denies he's a hacker. His defense attorney claimed his case is politically motivated in the U.S.

The decision by Justice Minister Robert Pelikan was announced just minutes after the country's Constitutional Court released a statement that it rejected a last-minute appeal from the Nikulin as "groundless."

No further details were immediately available about the decision in a case that pitted the U.S. against Russia.

The Czechs arrested Nikulin in Prague in cooperation with the FBI in October 2016. He is accused by U.S. prosecutors of penetrating computers at Silicon Valley firms in 2012 and they want him extradited to face trial.

Russia also wanted him extradited on a separate charge of internet theft in 2009.

Both countries submitted their extradition requests on the same date.

The Russian authorities previously had said they would do all they could to prevent Nikulin's extradition to the U.S.

Czech courts previously ruled both extradition requests meet the necessary legal conditions, leaving the decision to the justice minister.

But after a last-ditch complaint filed by Nikulin with the country's Constitutional Court, the minister had to hold off on a decision until the court ruled.

Earlier this week, U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan said in Prague that under Czech extradition law "we have every reason to believe and expect that Mr. Nikulin will be extradited to America."

But the Czech Republic's pro-Russia president, Milos Zeman, repeatedly asked Pelikan to allow Nikulin's extradition to Russia, the minister said. Zeman has no official say in cases like this one.

Pelikan's decision will likely further strain relations between the Czech Republic and Russia after the Czechs expelled three Russian diplomats in solidarity with Britain over a nerve agent attack on an ex-spy.

In a statement published by Russia's Tass news agency, the Russian Embassy in Prague called the step "deeply disappointing."

"Prague once again preferred the notorious allied solidarity without taking into account all the factors and circumstances of this case," Alexei Kolmakov, the embassy's press secretary, was quoted as saying.

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