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## Robertson's Nato aide accused of \$200m money-laundering scam

**By Paul Lashmar**

29 June 2003

A key adviser to Nato's Secretary General, Lord Robertson, is facing charges of running a \$200m (£120m) money-laundering operation between Colombia and Romania.

Lieutenant-Colonel Willem Matser, a Russian-speaking former intelligence officer from the Netherlands, was arrested earlier this year after Dutch customs seized a parcel at Schiphol Airport. It contained a \$200,000 transaction document issued by Bank Santander in Bogota, the Colombian capital, destined for a Romanian company called Tender SA, as well as a CD with data detailing the transfer of \$200m to the company. The Dutch authorities later raided Col Matser's house and allegedly found forged documents.

The charges are a major embarrassment to Nato, as Col Matser was, until his arrest, one of Lord Robertson's top policy experts on central and eastern Europe. He has played an important role in the expansion of Nato into the region, culminating in a summit in Istanbul next May at which seven eastern European nations, including Romania, will be welcomed into the organisation.

The Dutch authorities are investigating Col Matser's relationship with Ovidiu Tender, head of a Romanian conglomerate which bears his name. In Romania, where the case has become a cause célèbre, Tender SA has interests in agriculture, gas, oil and chemicals and is considering going into mining.

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Col Matser is to be accused of having organised money transfers from Colombia to Romania as part of the money-laundering scheme. He admitted carrying out 16 such transfers, but says his relationship with Mr Tender started at the initiative of the Romanian businessman, who contacted him with an investment proposal. According to Dutch prosecutors, the funds held at Bank Santander were of a type that cannot be transferred abroad, which is how the suspicion of money laundering arose.

At the very least, Col Matser seems to have become heavily involved in financial dealings with senior figures in Romania while still a senior Nato employee. He was introduced to Mr Tender in April 2002 by Ioan Talpes, a special adviser to President Ion Iliescu, at a Nato-related conference at a Romanian ski resort.

Further questions were raised in Romania when it was revealed that at the first meeting between Col Matser and Mr Tender, two generals from the Romanian secret services were present. The Romanian secret service was then involved in setting up a company in the Netherlands with the Dutch officer as a director.

Before Col Matser's arrest, Mr Tender told the Romanian media that the Nato man and he were going to bid for the state-owned petroleum company, Petrom National Society, Romania's biggest enterprise, and claimed that the US company Halliburton, Vice-President Richard Cheney's former firm, was involved. Petrom is the centre of a bidding war in Romania involving not only local businessmen but international giants such as Chevron and BP.

Col Matser, who is next due to appear in court in August, denies money laundering, claiming that the transactions were to do with an investment scheme. Mr Tender also denies any involvement in money laundering.

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