

Latvian Police Impose Travel Ban on Luzhkov

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Latvia has dealt a blow to Yury Luzhkov's hopes to move freely throughout Europe by declaring the former mayor persona non grata.

"Interior Minister Linda Murniece decided to include Luzhkov on a blacklist of undesirable persons," her ministry said Tuesday in a statement on its web site.

Luzhkov was banned for representing "a threat to the country," the statement said.

The ministry did not elaborate, but Murniece said Monday that Luzhkov, who as Moscow's mayor frequently assailed the three Baltic states' policies toward Russia, had a "negative attitude" toward Latvia.

The decision means that Luzhkov won't get a residency permit, which he applied for last month, but also that he is barred from entering the country. But he can continue to travel to

other European countries because the blacklist is only national, ministry spokeswoman Gunta Skrebele said by telephone.

Latvia joined the Schengen open-border agreement in 2007, and a residency permit for one of the 25 countries in the zone entitles a Russian citizen to enter the others with few restrictions.

Luzhkov has said he applied for Latvian residency because of a law that entitles foreigners to a permit when they put some \$380,000 in a local bank account and leave it there.

Murniece later explained that Luzhkov clearly did not really intend to invest in the Latvian economy and allowing him to live there amounted to a humiliation of the Latvian people.

“The grounds [of denying his request] were his hostile comments about Latvia, his wish to utilize Latvia for personal goals,” she said, Interfax reported.

Luzhkov himself did not comment on the decision Tuesday, but a source close to him said that he was not surprised. “After the media sensation such a decision from the Latvian authorities was to be expected and therefore Yury Luzhkov was prepared for a denial,” the source told Interfax.

Luzhkov will try to obtain residency in another European country in the near future, the source added. President Dmitry Medvedev fired Luzhkov last September for loss of confidence. The former mayor, who governed the capital for 18 years and has been accused of rampant corruption, said Monday that he has no plans to emigrate.

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