The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Mikhalkov Loses His Flashing Blue Light

By Alexandra Odynova

May 23, 2011



Oscar-winning film director Nikita Mikhalkov will have to navigate Moscow's notorious traffic jams as a regular motorist now that he has lost his much-lambasted road privileges provided by the Defense Ministry.

Mikhalkov was handed a flashing blue light that entitles cars to ignore traffic rules as a member of the Defense Ministry's public council. The use of the device is supposed to be limited to civil servants, prompting a furious backlash from bloggers who accused Mikhalkov of misusing his ties with authorities.

Mikhalkov repeatedly refused to give up the blue light, but lost the right to use it after quitting the council last week. He said he resigned to protest the military's policies, but there were suspicions that he left after being stripped of the blue light.

In a letter to Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov and the council, first reported by Komsomolskaya Pravda on Monday, Mikhalkov said his departure was prompted by his disappointment in the last two Victory Day parades on Red Square.

The parades, meant to showcase Russia's military might, were a "shame" and indicated "disrespect" for the army, Mikhalkov was quoted as writing.

Among the issues cited by Mikhalkov were the invitation of NATO troops to last year's parade and the use of helicopters instead of fighter jets this year.

He said his repeated calls to change the parades' format were ignored, prompting him "after much doubt and meditation" to file his resignation.

"I'm giving up this post with regret, along with the blue light and credentials," Mikhalkov said.

The ministry confirmed Monday that Mikhalkov had given up his seat, losing the right to the blue light, Interfax said. But an unidentified ministry official told Interfax that the director was stripped of the blue light first and decided to quit after that.

Mikhalkov, 65, denied the allegation Monday.

Council member Igor Korotchenko confirmed Mikhalkov's departure, which he said "will no way affect the council's work."

Mikhalkov did attend the council's meetings and events but rarely spoke critically about the ministry's activities, said Korotchenko, editor of the Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer defense weekly.

"It's true that he criticized the absence of Suvorov and Nakhimov military college students at last year's parade. ... But it happened only once, last year," Korotchenko said by telephone.

He said only the council's head has a blue light and welcomed the idea of not granting one to Mikhalkov's yet-to-be-appointed successor.

The 30-member council was formed in 2006 to exercise public control over the army. But it is only entitled to issue recommendations and has not made any significant impact on army-related policies since its inception. Its members include well-known culture figures and businessmen like Interros head Vladimir Potanin and VTB chairman Andrei Kostin.

The loss of the blue light continues a string of disappointments for Mikhalkov. His latest feature film, the war epic "Citadel," the last part of his "Burnt by the Sun" trilogy, bombed at the box office this month, grossing in its debut week 19 million rubles ($670,000) against a reported budget of 1.5 billion rubles ($50 million) for "Citatel" and its prequel "Exodus," shot back-to-back.

Emergency Situations Minister Sergei Shoigu's personal driver has been fired after threatening to shoot another motorist in the head, prominent blogger Andrei Malgin wrote Monday on LiveJournal.

The driver, identified by Malgin as Vladimir Shishkin, was filmed barking the threat through a loudspeaker while trying to navigate a traffic jam on the Moscow Ring Road earlier this month.

The official reason for the firing included the misuse of flashing blue lights, not death threats, Malgin wrote.

A copy of the dismissal order published on the blog does not say whether Shoigu was in the car at the time.

The ministry earlier denied that he was in the car and said the driver had been fined and reprimanded.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/05/23/mikhalkov-loses-his-flashing-blue-light-a7139