

Oops! Finland Blacklists Putin

April 11, 2013

The  Moscow Times

President Vladimir Putin has responded “ironically” to the news that Finland accidentally put him on a blacklist of people with connections to criminal activity.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said Thursday that a Finnish apology for the mistake would not require a response from the Russian side.

"I do not think this requires some kind of response," Peskov said on Kommersant FM radio. "As far as we know, the Finnish side discovered the mistake on its own and in time."

Asked for Putin's reaction, he said, “Ironic.” He did not elaborate.

Seeking to avoid a diplomatic spat, Finland quickly removed Putin's name from the list, which is not public but whose inclusion of Putin was revealed by Finnish broadcaster MTV3 on Wednesday.

Police acknowledged that the list existed and said Putin's name was accidentally included but had since been deleted.

"I wish to extend to Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, sincere apologies for the incorrect registry entry," Interior Minister Paivi Rasanen said in a statement.

Police said it was not immediately clear how Putin's name came to be included on the list, and it was being investigated. Finnish chief of police Mikko Paatero said the incident was regrettable.

"These kind of incidents are extremely exceptional, and not under any circumstance acceptable," he said in a statement.

Several media reports speculated that Putin's name had appeared on the list due to his connection with the motorcycle club Night Wolves. The club is led by a former dentist, Alexander Zaldostanov, aka The Surgeon, who was recently awarded a medal from Putin for promoting "patriotic values."

It was unclear what connection the Night Wolves club has to Finland.

Many Finns are wary of their powerful neighbor, having fought the Soviet Union in the Winter War of 1939-40 and the Continuation War during World War II.

Finland, which was once part of tsarist Russia, is now one of the country's leading economic partners.

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Material from Reuters is included in this report.

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