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Foreign Ministries Deny Russian Expulsion From G8

By Matthew Bodner

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French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius speaking at an event in September 2009.

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A number of G8 members have distanced themselves from an earlier statement made by the French foreign minister, who said that Russia's participation in the body had been suspended in response to Moscow's actions in Crimea.

France, the U.S., Britain, Germany, Japan, Italy and Canada have already pulled out of preparations for a G8 summit set to be held in Russia in June, but on Tuesday Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius pushed the envelope further, telling Europe-1 radio that "it is envisaged that all the other countries, the seven leading countries, will unite without Russia."

Britain, Germany and Japan have since said that they were unaware that a suspension had been agreed on, however.

“The G7 collectively made clear last week that we would take further action should the Russian Federation seek to annex Crimea”, the British Foreign Office said in a statement, adding that any decision regarding Russia's membership has yet to be made, The Associated Press reported.

Fabius' statement came after it was reported that he and French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian would not go to Moscow to meet with their Russian counterparts Sergei Lavrov and Sergei Shoigu.

The meeting was scheduled to take place on Tuesday and no new date for the meeting has been proposed.

Fabius said that visiting Moscow at this time would create "the impression that we support" Russian actions in Crimea, "and this is not so."

However, Fabius said that "we are continuing dialogue with the Russians, despite the fact that we do not agree with them," Interfax reported.

An unidentified Russian diplomat told Reuters on Monday about the postponement after President Vladimir Putin recognized Crimea as a sovereign state.

Fabius warned Russia that it is isolating itself and faces "economic catastrophe" if it does not stand down.

The U.S. and European Union on Monday imposed sanctions on more than a dozen Crimean and Russian officials involved in setting up Sunday's referendum in Crimea, in which the peninsula voted to become part of Russia.

President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday signed an agreement to annex Crimea in a move widely condemned by the West and the interim government in Kiev.

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