

Booking.Com Investigates Hotels for Links to Sanctioned Ukrainians

By [Diana Kulchitskaya](#)

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The Dnipro hotel in Kiev declined to say if it received an inquiry concerning links to sanctioned individuals.

International online reservation service Booking.com is investigating Ukrainian and Crimean hotels for possible connections to Viktor Yanukovich and 17 other Ukrainians against whom the European Union is enforcing sanctions.

The Amsterdam-based international company, which has offices world-wide and lists 425,000 hotels, apartments and hostels on its worldwide database, said they took the step in the fear that the EU may sue them for violating European sanctions against Ukrainian politicians ousted from power last month by long-running street protests.

"As a Dutch company we fall under the trade restrictions of the EU and cannot do business with the 18 persons identified by the European Commission who were part of, or related to the former government in Ukraine," said Anoeska Van Leeuwen, communications director

at Booking.com.

The EU sanction list includes Yanukovych, his sons, the former Interior Minister Vitaly Zakharchenko, former Attorney General Victor Pshonka and others.

Booking.com said it would sever any contact with hotels that did not respond to a written request to confirm that none of the 18 sanctioned individuals have any stake in the business.

Their removal from the Booking.com database would potentially hit hotels hard "Fifty of every 100 bookings are made through Booking.com," a spokesperson of Comfortable Rooms in Berdyansk in southeast Ukraine told Kommersant.

The Yanukovych family is said to have business interests not only in the investment and oil sectors, but also in tourism. Yanukovych's son Alexander owns a yacht club and a hotel in Balaklava, the site of an underground Soviet submarine base near Sevastopol in Crimea, reported Forbes.

The small circle of politicians and business people close to Victor Yanukovych — known as "the family" — are widely believed to have amassed extensive wealth since Yanukovych was elected president in elections in 2010.

"We do not know which hotels belong to whom, we work only with the management," said a representative of the association of Ukrainian Hotels in Kiev on Thursday. The Tourist Association of Ukraine declined to give comment or reveal what share of the tourism business belongs to Yanukovych and his inner circle.

The hotel Slavyansky Alliance in Yalta confirmed that they received a letter from Booking.com. "We have already replied that we have no connections to Yanukovych or other officials and politicians," a representative of the hotel, who requested anonymity, said Thursday. "We were very confused by this step by Booking.com, but will continue working with them," she said.

The Dnipro Hotel in Kiev declined to say if they received such a statement from the online reservation service.

Contact the author at d.kulchitskaya@imedia.com

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