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Australia Slaps Sanctions on Russia Over Ukraine Bloodshed

By Mark Lammey

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Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop

Australia on Thursday announced asset freezes and travel bans against 50 Russian officials and businessmen and 11 Russian companies that it blames for the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

The sanctions — Australia's first against Russia since the Ukrainian crisis exploded — follow the same lines as those imposed by the U.S. and the European Union in recent months, targeting members of President Vladimir Putin's inner circle, as well as banks and companies connected to the ruling elite.

Among the people included on Australia's consolidated blacklist as of Thursday are billionaire businessmen Boris Rotenberg and his brother Arkady — Putin's former judo partner — and Gennady Timchenko.

SMP Bank and Investkapitalbank, both of which list the Rotenbergs among their co-owners,

are also on the blacklist, published on the Australian Foreign Ministry's website, as is industrial construction company Stroitransgaz — 63 percent owned by Timchenko.

Top-level Russian politicians to have been named are Presidential aides Sergei Glazyev, an economist and fierce proponent of Eurasian economic integration, and Vladislav Surkov, formerly Putin's chief political fixer. Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin and Yelena Mizulina, head of the State Duma's committee on family women and children, are also on the list.

Responding to the list's publication, Matviyenko slammed Australia's imposition of sanctions as "a theater of the absurd," and said that they should "only provoke laughter from everyone now, or at least a smile," RIA Novosti reported.

"Those who provoked this political crisis, those who stirred the pot, brought the country to a state of civil war and humanitarian catastrophe, they are known but their names have not wound up on any blacklists," Matviyenko said.

Russia is the one "constantly being threatened, having a political club waved at it, sanctions imposed on it," despite the fact that it is the one country fighting for a peaceful solution to the crisis, she said.

That stance does not wash with the West, which pins on Russia much of the responsibility for the situation in Ukraine. Since Moscow-leaning former President Viktor Yanukovych was ousted by street protesters in February, Russia has annexed the Crimean peninsula and — as the West sees it — colluded in the eruption of violence in Ukraine's eastern regions. The death tally during fighting between government troops and separatists in eastern Ukraine has risen into the scores.

Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said in a statement that the sanctions reaffirm Australia's support for Ukraine and urged armed groups in eastern Ukraine to lay down their weapons and enter into peace talks.

Bishop first announced Australia's intention to impose sanctions on Russian and Ukrainian officials in March, before widening the net in May, though no names were provided on either occasion.

See also:

Biden Threatens Russia With Further Sanctions Over Ukraine

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