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# Russia's Largest Watchmaker Refuses to Sell to 'Decadent' West

By Peter Spinella

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The Petrodvorets Watch Factory, famous for its nostalgic Soviet-style brands, said that it had decided to "answer to the decadent Western countries."

Russia's oldest and largest mechanical watchmaker says it will stop selling its most prestigious self-winding watches abroad as long as the "decadent" West continues to impose "unfair" sanctions over Russia's involvement in Ukraine.

Jacques von Polier, the French CEO of the Petrodvorets Watch Factory in St. Petersburg, said the company will refrain from selling to foreign retailers its upmarket Avtomat (Automatic) watches, which use the wearer's wrist movement to wind automatically.

"The sanctions are totally unfair. The world wants to make Russia the only guilty country in the Ukraine conflict, but the situation is not simply black-and-white. The sanctions are pouring oil on the fire," he told The Moscow Times on Monday.

The company, famous for its nostalgic Soviet-style Raketa (Rocket) and Pobeda (Victory) brands, said in a recent press release that it had decided to "answer to the decadent Western countries" because "workers of the factory are shocked by these rude and unfair sanctions."

Von Polier, who has been trying to restore the aging factory's Soviet prestige since joining in 2009, said the refusal to sell the Avtomat watches, which can retail for more than $1,000, would have little effect on his business. Indeed, for the Russia-focused company, the move is a nifty piece of PR.

"There is so much demand in Russia that we don't need Western markets," he said, adding that the measure is at least partially a marketing gimmick to jump on a groundswell of patriotism in Russia as the country's standoff with the West continues.

Since Russia's annexation of the former Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea in March, the United States and European Union have imposed a number of sanctions on Russian companies and citizens in an effort to dissuade the country from further involvement in Ukraine.

Petrodvorets seized the marketing opportunity early. Around the time of the annexation, it released a special-edition "Crimea Victory 2014" watch, which had originally been intended to commemorate 70 years since the peninsula's liberation from the Nazis in World War II.

Von Polier, whose great-grandmother was born in Crimea, said by phone that "for me, Crimea has always been Russian."

Petrodvorets also said it was recommending a law to Russia's parliament to forbid state officials from buying Western-brand watches as presents for employees and associates.

Petrodvorets is Russia's only producer of a complete mechanical watch movement, and Von Polier said it would continue to sell parts — specifically, springs and escapements — to watchmakers in Switzerland to fulfill demand after Swatch Group announced it would stop selling movements to competing brands.

"We are proud that we are one of only four or five manufacturers in the world that can produce such movements," he said.

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Contact the author at p.spinella@imedia.ru

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