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Deputy Prime Minister Promises Not to Ban McDonald's From Russia

By The Moscow Times

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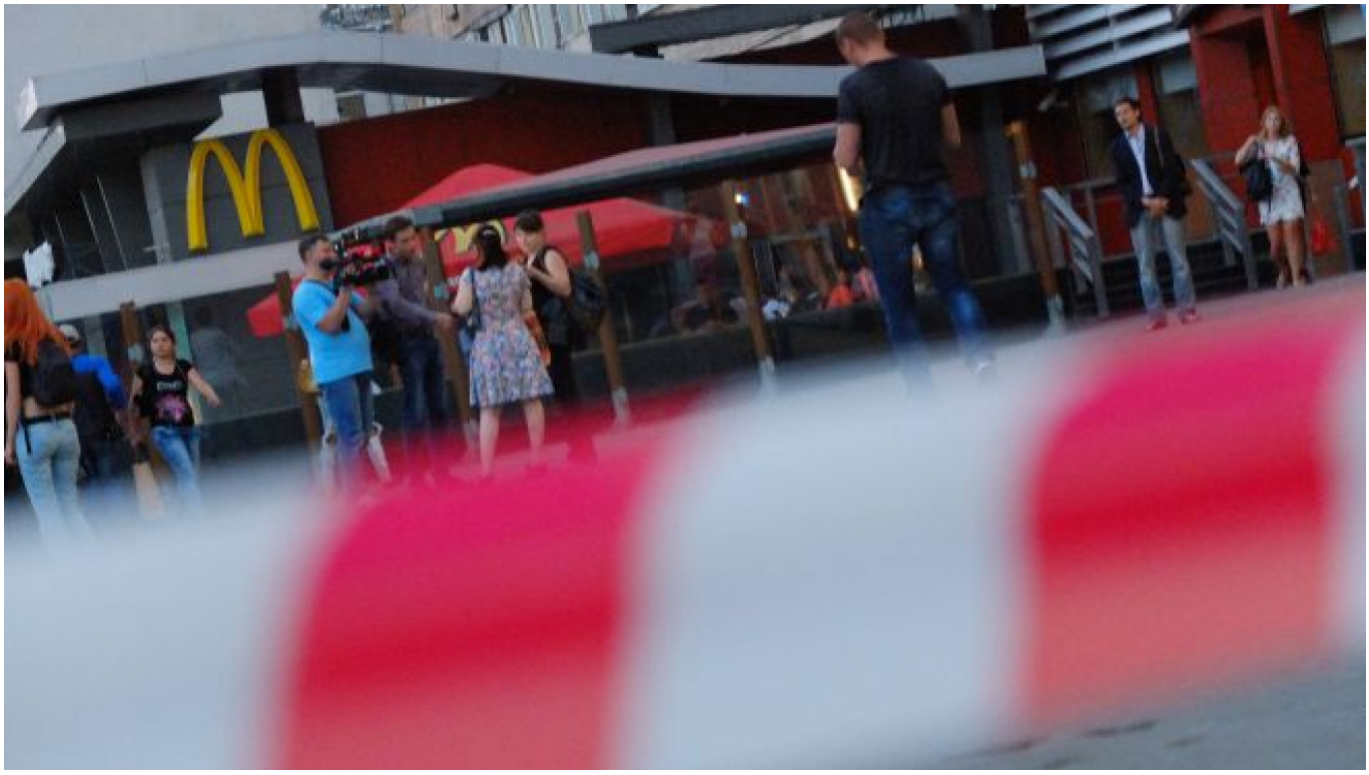

People standing outside the closed McDonald's on Pushkin Square in central Moscow.

Russian authorities are not planning to close the McDonald's chain in the country, Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich said after inspectors visited a number of restaurants run by the fast-food company.

"No one is talking about it at all [a ban on McDonald's in Russia]," Dvorkovich was quoted as saying Saturday by the ITAR-Tass news agency, in what could be a reprieve for the food chain, which considers Russia as one of its top markets.

Russia's food safety watchdog has launched inspections of McDonald's restaurants across the country and has closed four of its outlets in Moscow — including the one on Pushkin Square that was the first to open in Russia just before the collapse of the Soviet Union — citing breaches of sanitary regulations.

The outlets were closed as Russia introduced a one-year embargo on meat, fish, dairy, fruit and vegetables from the U.S., EU, Canada, Australia and Norway, in retaliation for Western economic sanctions over Moscow's involvement in the Ukraine conflict.

A symbol of U.S. capitalism, McDonald's operates 440 restaurants in Russia and considers the country one of its top seven markets outside the U.S. and Canada, according to its annual report last year.

The food safety watchdog has made coordinated inspections of McDonald's restaurants in many Russian regions, including in central Russia, Moscow and the Urals.

"It has just happened that the inspections were completed at the same time," Dvorkovich said, according to the report.

Russian politicians waded into the debate on Friday, with Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the rabble-rousing leader of the Liberal-Democratic Party, calling for a McDonald's sign in downtown Moscow to be ripped down, ITAR-Tass reported.

"We need to get rid of this sign. This disgusting sign has to go. What gives them the right to teach us how to make pirozhki [stuffed Russian buns]!" Zhirinovsky exclaimed to the few dozen people assembled at a political rally.

Yekaterinburg Mayor Yevgeny Roizman, a prominent opposition figure, had a less sanguine view of the matter.

"If we consider ourselves a great country and a great power, then these are petty deeds, on the level of mice," Roizman said in an interview on Komsomolskaya Pravda radio.

"It's a blow to our own people — to consumers, for one, and obviously all the suppliers are locals. Hitting your own people doesn't make any sense," he said.

Material from The Moscow Times is included in this report.

See Also:

[Crackdown on McDonald's Spreads Across Russia]

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