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Courts Close 3 Moscow McDonald's Branches for 90 Days

By The Moscow Times

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A man unsuccessfully trying to get into the McDonald's restaurant on Manezh Square in the center of Moscow last week.

Moscow courts on Wednesday backed the temporary closures of three of the city's McDonald's restaurants for breaches of sanitary rules, amid a standoff with the West over Ukraine, while the state food-safety watchdog suspended work at a fourth.

The three restaurants — on Moscow's Manezh square, near the walls of the Kremlin, at Pushkin Square and on Prospekt Mira — have been closed since last week on the orders of the Federal Consumer Protection Service. The court rulings confirmed that decision.

The watchdog has introduced sweeping checks, including unscheduled inspections, at McDonald's restaurants across the country.

On Wednesday it ordered the temporary closure of a fourth branch in the capital — the sixth

nationwide.

Russian businessmen have said the crackdown is linked to the crisis over Ukraine, which has soured U.S.-Russian relations and led to a round of sanctions and trade restrictions. The watchdog has denied that its actions are politically motivated.

McDonald's said it would appeal the court rulings, which ordered the three Moscow branches to be closed for 90 days.

"We do not agree with the courts' decisions and will appeal them according to established procedures. We will continue to take care of our employees and do everything we can to continue successful operations in Russia," said a spokeswoman for the U.S. firm in Russia.

A lawyer representing McDonald's in the court, Maxim Titarenko, was also quoted as saying the courts' decisions to close the branches were unjustified.

"The court has ordered the maximum penalty under this article of the Code of Administrative Offenses although there are no grounds for it," Titarenko said, Interfax reported.

A court in the Urals region delivered a similar ruling on Wednesday when it ordered the closure of a McDonald's restaurant in the city of Yekaterinburg for 85 days, backing the food safety watchdog's decision the day before.

McDonald's operates 440 restaurants in Russia and considers the country one of its top seven markets outside the United States and Canada, according to its 2013 annual report. Almost 1 million people a day visit its restaurants in Russia.

See also:

2 More McDonald's Shut in Russia as Crackdown Continues

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