Moscow Slams Sweden's Move to Sell Russian Trade Building

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Russia's Foreign Ministry has lashed out at the Swedish government for putting Russia's Trade Mission in Stockholm up for auction, claiming the Scandinavian country violated international law by doing so.

In a statement issued Monday, the Foreign Ministry said it would refuse to recognize the sale of the building, which it says is protected by diplomatic immunity, despite an earlier ruling by Sweden's Supreme Court lifting that protected status.

"This isn't the first time Swedish authorities have attempted to infringe on the rights of the sovereign diplomatic property of the Russian Federation, contravening basic international law," the ministry's statement said.

The Swedish Enforcement Authority put the building up for sale on Sept. 12 in connection with a 2011 ruling by the Swedish Supreme Court to lift its diplomatic protection. The court's decision was meant to end a decade-long legal saga between German investor Franz Sedelmayer and the Russian government.

After Sedelmayer lost $2.3 million in a joint investment project with Russian authorities in the 1990s, he initiated arbitration against Russia to recoup his losses.

The international commercial arbitration court in Stockholm ruled in his favor in 1998, and in 2011 Sweden's Supreme Court lifted the immune status of Russia's Trade Mission, saying it should be sold to pay off Sedelmayer.

Russia's Foreign Ministry has strongly objected, however, arguing that the ruling violated the norms of international law.

"The Russian side retains the right to respond to the Swedish side with adequate retaliatory measures," Monday's Foreign Ministry statement said, adding that Sweden was "obligated to take all necessary measures to ensure the immunity and safety of the Russian mission … in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations."

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