The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Polish Foreign Minister Fans Flames of Dispute Over War Anniversary

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February 02, 2015

The Polish foreign minister suggested Monday that this year's celebrations to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II should not be held in Russia, the latest volley in an ongoing diplomatic spat between the two countries over war anniversaries.

"Why did we so easily get used to Moscow being the place where the end of hostilities is celebrated, instead of London or Berlin, which would have been more natural?" Grzegorz Schetyna was cited by Russian media as saying on air on Poland's RMF FM radio.

Russia's Foreign Ministry was quick to slam the comments by Schetyna, who last month elicited a wave of outrage in Russia when he credited Ukraine rather than the Soviet Red Army with the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

"He [Schetnya] is trying to bring shame not only on himself, but on the Polish diplomatic service" with such statements, Grigory Karasin, deputy head of the Russian Foreign Ministry,

told Govorit Moskva radio station Tuesday.

Last week, Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski said he would invite European leaders to mark this year's anniversary at the Westerplatte Peninsula in Gdansk, where war broke out on Sept. 1, 1939 when German forces invaded Poland.

Kremlin Chief of Staff Sergei Ivanov responded at the time by saying that Komarowski's suggestion was "aimed at discouraging European leaders from coming to Moscow on May 9," state news agency RIA Novosti reported.

As relations between Russia and the West sink to post-Cold War lows over the conflict in Ukraine, most European leaders have not yet said whether or not they will attend Moscow's celebrations, though both the Latvian president and prime minister have said they will not be coming.

Ivanov said last week that 22 world leaders, including those from the Commonwealth of Independent States, Asian countries and Israel, had agreed to attend the ceremony.

The May 9 celebration of the Allied victory against Nazi Germany in World War II is a public holiday in Russia and has been marked with increasing pomp and ceremony in recent years, such as the revival of large-scale military parades on Red Square.

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