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EU Adds Famous Russian Singer and Deputy Ministers to Ukraine Sanctions List

By The Moscow Times

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Iosif Kobzon (R), Russian singer and a deputy of the State Duma, Russia's lower house of Parliament, and Alexander Zakharchenko, separatist leader of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, sing during a concert, at a local theater in Donetsk, eastern Ukraine, Oct. 27, 2014.

A veteran Russian singer who voiced support for Russia's annexation of Crimea has been subjected to EU sanctions in a new blacklist published by the European Union on Monday.

Moscow said the EU's decision "contradicts common sense" by imposing new sanctions one day after the start of a cease-fire in the conflict between Kiev and Russian-backed rebels.

Iosif Kobzon, 77, is the best-known name on the list, which imposes asset freezes and travel bans on 19 people and nine organizations, including two Russian deputy defense ministers.

Valery Rashkin, a Communist Party representative in Russia's lower house of parliament, said

on Twitter that he is "proud" of being included on the new sanctions list.

"This is simply a present for my birthday," he tweeted. His birthday is March 14, according to the party's website.

They join scores of Russians and Ukrainians already under EU sanctions that also hit Russia's defense, energy and finance sectors.

Kobzon, sometimes considered Russia's answer to Frank Sinatra, is also a long-time member of parliament and was added to the sanctions list because he had "visited the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and during his visit made statements supporting separatists," according to the EU's Official Journal.

Kobzon was born in a rural mining town in the Donetsk region when it was part of the Soviet Union. The region is now at the center of the rebellion against Kiev's rule.

He gave a free concert in eastern Ukraine in the run-up to an election of the leader of the rebel regions in November that was not recognized abroad.

Kobzon said before opening another concert with a patriotic song: "We are strong, and people fear us. Let them be afraid."

Maria Zakharova, deputy director of the Russian Foreign Ministry's press department, said on Facebook that Kobzon was being "punished for his sincere and heartfelt rendition of our beloved 'Victory Day' song."

"Joseph, sing, please carry on singing!" she said.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said Moscow would respond "adequately" to the new sanctions.

Despite a cease-fire that was negotiated by Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France coming into force on Sunday, there was heavy shelling on a government-held town in east Ukraine on Monday and a Kiev military source said four Ukrainian soldiers had been killed and 21 wounded.

Also on the new sanctions list were Russian First Deputy Defense Minister Arkady Bakhin and Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov, for supporting the deployment of Russian troops to Ukraine, and Andrei Kartapolov, deputy chief of the general staff, for shaping the Russian military campaign, the EU said.

Russia denies it has soldiers operating in eastern Ukraine.

(Reuters, MT)

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