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'Je Suis Kobzon' — Russian Politician Jumps to Defend Singer Hit by EU Sanctions

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Kobzon, whose singing career has spanned more than half a century, is a long-time member of parliament.

A lawmaker has called for Russians to rally behind Soviet crooner Iosif Kobzon under a Russified version of "Je suis Charlie" — a slogan that has come to symbolize freedom of speech in the aftermath of last month's terrorist attacks on Paris.

"We in the Russian parliament are united in our outrage over the blacklisting of our respected colleagues Iosif Kobzon and [Communist deputy] Valery Rashkin," Vyacheslav Nikonov, a deputy with the ruling United Russia party, said Tuesday at a plenary session, TASS news agency reported.

"We are with you. If they are all Charlie, we are all Kobzon, and we are all Rashkin," Nikonov said, presumably using "they" to refer to the European Union, which on Monday expanded its sanctions list over Russia's involvement in Ukraine.

The new list imposed asset freezes and travel bans on 19 people and nine organizations, including two Russian deputy defense ministers.

Kobzon, whose singing career has spanned more than half a century, is 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 made statements supporting separatists," according to the EU's Official Journal.

He also gave a free concert in the rebel stronghold of Donetsk, where he was born, in the run-up to separatist elections in November, which the West has refused to recognize as valid.

A total of 17 people were killed in Paris over three days of violence in January that began after Islamists opened fire on the headquarters of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo.

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