

Russian Ministry Confirms Ban on Travel Abroad for Police

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Police officers are still allowed to travel to countries within the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States.

Russia's Interior Ministry has confirmed earlier reports that police officers have been told to no longer travel outside the former Soviet Union, state news agency RIA Novosti reported Tuesday.

It was earlier reported that the ministry had temporarily banned staff from traveling abroad in April 2014, a month after Russia annexed Crimea to much outrage in the West. Similar bans were reportedly imposed on staff in the Defense Ministry, Emergency Situations Ministry and Prosecutor General's Office, allegedly over concerns that Russian officials could be detained by a foreign government.

Police officers are still allowed to travel to countries within the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, RIA reported.

An unnamed ministry spokesperson told the news agency that officers reacted "with understanding" because they know they have a "special responsibility, including a number of limitations within certain circumstances."

Parliament member Alexander Khinshtein earlier asked Vladimir Kolokoltsev, head of the Interior Ministry, to explain reports of the ban, and a copy of the letter was posted on Khinshtein's website.

"Obviously this measure will, first and foremost, cause an outflow of professional, qualified staff," Khinshtein, who heads the State Duma's security and anti-corruption committee, said in the letter.

He noted that the ban came into force "almost simultaneously with an order by you [Kolokoltsev] to temporarily halt the hiring of new staff" and downsize the police force by 10 percent.

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