

Norway Angry That Russian Deputy Prime Minister Violated Travel Ban

By [Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber](#)

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Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin has angered the Norwegian government by visiting that country's Arctic territory despite a travel ban imposed on him over Russia's annexation of Crimea last year, regional-focused news site Barents Observer reported Saturday.

Rogozin, who oversees Russia's aerospace, defense and Arctic industries, visited the island of Spitsbergen on his way to the North Pole to inspect a Russian mining settlement.

The deputy prime minister was slapped with a Norwegian travel ban and asset freeze last March for his alleged actions "undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine." He also appears on the sanctions lists of the United States, European Union and Canada.

In response to the visit, Norwegian Foreign Ministry spokesman Frode Andersen said that sanctioned Russian officials are "not wanted" in the area, and that Norwegian authorities are considering measures to reinforce entry bans, the Barents Observer reported.

Spitsbergen, Norway's largest island, is an international demilitarized and free economic zone. Unsanctioned Russians are able to enter the territory without a visa, but the land is still considered a sovereign entity of the Norwegian state.

After visiting the island, Rogozin went to the North Pole to inaugurate a drifting Russian scientific center that will house Russian researchers studying the Arctic Ocean.

"They [Norwegian officials] are just jealous that we swam on the North Pole," Rogozin wrote on Twitter on Sunday, referring to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry's reaction to his visit.

Two other high-ranking Russian officials who have not been sanctioned over Ukraine — Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev and Natural Resources and Environment Minister Sergei Donskoi — were also on the trip.

The expansion of Russian military presence in the Arctic was among the principles outlined in the country's new military doctrine, adopted in December. Last month the Russian government created a state commission on Arctic development that Rogozin was appointed to head.

"Now all factors are in place for us to establish a permanent presence in the Arctic and make it our own, at least the part within the limits of our responsibility," Rogozin said Sunday in comments carried by state news agency TASS.

Rogozin added that this process would include Russia's development of the Northern Sea Route and scientific research in the region.

Contact the author at g.tetraultfarber@imedia.ru

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