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Russia Imposes Travel Ban on 89 EU Politicians

By The Moscow Times

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Russia has imposed an entry ban on 89 European politicians and military leaders, according to a list seen by Reuters, a move that has angered Europe and worsened its standoff with the West over Moscow's role in the Ukraine conflict.

More than 6,200 people have been killed in fighting between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists. Russia dismisses accusations from Ukraine, NATO and Western powers that it is supporting the separatists with arms and its own troops.

The list, which says it was compiled by the Russian foreign ministry and handed to a European Union delegation in Moscow this week, includes outspoken critics of Russia as well as security officials.

Since Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014, the EU has imposed economic sanctions, visa bans and asset freezes on scores of Russian and Ukrainian citizens and organizations.

A spokesperson for EU foreign affairs told Reuters that in recent months Russia had denied entry to a number of EU politicians, based on their inclusion on a "confidential 'stop list.'"

"We take note that the Russian authorities have decided to share the list. We don't have any other information on legal basis, criteria and process," the spokesperson said.

Asked about the list while on a visit to Ukraine, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said it would hamper peace efforts.

"At a time in which we are trying to defuse a persistent and dangerous conflict, this does not contribute towards that," Steinmeier said.

The Russian Foreign Ministry was not immediately available for comment.

Blacklisted

Among those on the list is Uwe Corsepius, current secretary general of the European Union council in Brussels who is due to take over as foreign affairs advisor to German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Others blacklisted include Britain's former deputy prime minister Nick Clegg and former Belgian premier Guy Verhofstadt, who heads the Liberal group in the European parliament.

The list also carries the names of several former and acting ministers, such as Poland's deputy Justice Minister Robert Kupiecki and former British defence minister Malcolm Rifkind, as well as Swedish tax authority head Eva Lidstrom Adler.

Last Monday, Germany protested to Russia over its refusal to let a conservative German lawmaker Karl-Georg Wellmann, who had called Russia a "warmonger" earlier this year, into the country.

Speaking at a press conference on Friday, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said the list had no basis in international law. "It is not transparent and cannot be challenged before a judge. And so we condemn this act by Moscow and will tell them this."

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