

Opposition Lawmaker Dmitry Gudkov Implores Foreign Ministry to Publish EU Blacklist

May 31, 2015

The  Moscow Times

Dmitry Gudkov on a march in memory of Boris Nemtsov in Moscow, Mar. 1.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov needs to explain why 89 European politicians have been banned entry into Russia and confirm their names, opposition lawmaker Dmitry Gudkov requested Sunday in a formal complaint.

Gudkov, one of the rare voices in Russia's parliament who opposes the Kremlin, asked Lavrov on Sunday to confirm the names and to state why they were included.

Russia has shared the list with European Union officials, but has refused to release it. A leaked list published by the Finnish public broadcasting company Yle includes politicians from 17 EU countries, but no explanation for the bans.

The 28-nation EU on Saturday criticized the Russian bans as "totally arbitrary and unjustified, especially in the absence of any further clarification and transparency."

Two German parliament members who were turned back after flying into Moscow are on the list and were among several refusals that led the EU to ask Russia to identify those on the list. Also on the published list are several high-ranking officials from Britain, including the head of the MI5 security service, the chief of its defense staff and former Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg.

Gudkov's request drew a harsh reaction from Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

"Was he this active when EU countries put together their blacklists? And did he write such critical, or perhaps objective, letters to the leadership of EU countries with the request to stop compiling lists against Russian citizens?" Zakharova said on Govorit Moskva radio. "Probably he did this, but unfortunately for some reason no one knows about it."

The list includes outspoken critics of Russia as well as military and intelligence officials. A similar list exists for U.S. citizens, a ministry official told Russian media.

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.

Moscow denies Western accusations that it is supporting pro-Russian separatists battling government forces in Ukraine, where 6,200 people have died in the fighting.

A spokeswoman for EU foreign affairs said that in recent months Russia had denied entry to a number of EU politicians.

"We consider this measure as totally arbitrary and unjustified, especially in the absence of any further clarification and transparency," she said.

A spokeswoman for Britain's Foreign Office said there was no justification for the travel ban.

"If Russia's intention is to put pressure on the EU to ease sanctions then this is not the way to do it," she said.

A Russian Foreign Ministry official confirmed to Russian media that lists of banned individuals had been sent to EU states but declined to comment on the individuals themselves.

"The answer to the demands of several European states, why it was precisely these people who entered into the list ... is simple: It was done in answer to the sanctions campaign which has been waged in relation to Russia by several states of the European Union headed by Germany," the anonymous official was quoted as saying by news agency TASS.

"An analogous list exists in relation to citizens of the U.S., however one needs to note that in this case the Americans are behaving more constructively than the Europeans," he added.

(AP, Reuters)

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