

Odessa Club Cancels Concert by Patriotic Russian Rapper

By [Howard Amos](#)

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Russian singer Timati (R) and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

A club in the southern Ukrainian city of Odessa called off an upcoming performance by Russian rapper Timati after local governor and ex-Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili called for the singer to be banned for his allegedly anti-Ukraine stance.

The decision by Odessa's beachfront Ibiza club came after Saakashvili and Timati attacked each other in a series of social media posts about the planned appearance.

"We didn't consider the political undercurrents of his performance. ... Timati's concert in club Ibiza will be cancelled," the venue wrote on its Facebook page Sunday, noting that Timati had performed for them many times previously.

The decision was provoked by Saakashvili, appointed in May, who called Sunday for the rap artist to be refused entry to Ukraine on grounds of his support for Russian President Vladimir

Putin, and suggested a series of other performers from Russia who could be invited instead.

"I will emphatically recommend that the border service does not allow Putin sycophants onto embattled but free Ukrainian land," Saakashvili wrote in a Facebook post Sunday.

Timati hit back in a subsequent post on photo-sharing site Instagram. "I don't think that you, Mikheil, even in the context of your statements, should be placed alongside such names as Putin and [Chechen President Ramzan] Kadyrov," the singer wrote. "Real men do things rather than eat their ties."

In the direct aftermath of a brief 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, the BBC famously aired footage of Saakashvili nervously chewing on his tie as he took a phone call ahead of an interview, apparently unaware that the cameras were already rolling.

Known for his public statements of support for Putin, Timati also has extensively publicized friendly relationship with Kadyrov, who has been accused of widespread human rights abuses.

Many in the current pro-European government in Kiev fear that Odessa, a strategic Russian-speaking city bordering the Black Sea, could be vulnerable to pro-Russian agitation.

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