

Ukraine Launches Criminal Probe Into Berlusconi Over Crimea Visit

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Former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi

Ukrainian authorities have opened a criminal investigation into former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi for his September visit to Crimea, the UNIAN news agency reported Thursday, citing the deputy chairman of the human rights committee of the Verkhovna Rada, the country's parliament.

Berlusconi is being investigated for “publicly visiting Crimea without permission from Ukraine,” the report said. The charge carries a prison sentence of up to eight years, the Gazeta.ru news website cited deputy chairman Georgy Logvinsky as saying.

Berlusconi's visit to Crimea — the Black Sea peninsula annexed by Russia last year — earlier made headlines after the scandal-prone ex-leader and Russian President Vladimir Putin were televised sampling a 240-year-old bottle of wine.

Ukraine's security service in September banned Berlusconi from entry into Ukraine for three years over the visit.

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