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Russia Is Not Planning More Turkey Sanctions - Minister

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Russian Economy Minister Alexei Ulyukayev

Russia does not plan to expand its economic sanctions against Turkey, but is unlikely to restore visa-free travel for Turkish citizens any time soon, Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev said in an interview published Monday.

The minister told the Vedomosti business daily that Russians would face "real risks" should they travel to Turkey, while Turkish citizens coming to Russia may "bring those dangers here."

Turkish seaside resorts had been top holiday destinations for Russians until Moscow announced various punitive measures against Ankara over the shooting down of a Russian warplane near the border with Syria on Nov. 24. Ankara accused the Su-24 bomber of violating Turkish airspace, but Russia's President Vladimir Putin dismissed the accusation and called the downing a "stab in the back."

Ulyukayev claimed that a major risk Russians supposedly face from the NATO member country is that “you go as a tourist to Antalya, and won't come back,” Vedomosti reported.

Because of the proximity to Syria, the risks Russians face in Turkey are “higher than anywhere, because of an opaque border, tens of thousands of armed men — the army that's fighting there — who in the absence of a border will think nothing of getting as close to you as they want, while you are staying there,” he was quoted as saying.

Moscow has told tour operators to stop selling holiday packages to Turkey, and has canceled its visa-free regime for Turkish citizens. Ankara, meanwhile, said it had no plans to introduce visa requirements for Russians citizens, Russia's RIA Novosti news agency reported Friday.

Other Moscow sanctions included a ban on fruit, vegetable and poultry imports from Turkey — restrictions that Ulyukayev said might be among the first to be lifted, should relations improve.

“The risk of people's presence on a territory that is dangerous, and the risk of that danger being brought here — those are significant factors,” Ulyukayev was quoted by Vedomosti as saying. “In my view, the visa regime that we are introducing will remain in place for a long time. But tomatoes don't carry that risk, so [the ban on their imports] can be the first thing to be abolished.”

Putin had warned that Turkey “won't get away” with merely a ban on tomato imports. Ulyukayev declined to speculate what other measures the Russian president might have in mind, but insisted that there was “no talk” in the government about planning additional economic sanctions, Vedomosti reported.

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