

Turkish Students Expelled from Russian Universities for Poor Progress - Foreign Ministry

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Russia's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday denied reports that expulsions of Turkish students from Russian universities were driven by political motives amid a dispute between Moscow and Ankara, but urged Russian organizations to avoid “overzealousness” toward Turkish nationals.

The ministry was responding to a flurry of media reports and accounts by Turkish student associations in Russia, claiming that a number of universities have expelled Turkish students amid the two countries' increasingly sour relations over the downing of a Russian Su-24 fighter-bomber near the border with Syria.

The ministry said it has only been able to verify the expulsion of eight Turkish students from the Voronezh Institute of High Technologies.

“But this is not linked to any political motives, but to [the students'] academic failure and truancy,” the ministry said in a statement.

Turkish citizens in Russia have been caught up in a backlash after Turkey's shot down the Russian warplane – a hit that Russia's President Vladimir Putin called a “stab in the back by accomplices of terrorists.”

An activist from an association of Turkish students in Russia, Okan Yildiz, has said police and security agents searched the dorm rooms of Turkish students at Obninsk Institute for Nuclear Power Engineering, looking for drugs and accusing the students of sympathizing with “terrorists,” Russian media has reported.

A number of students were expelled after the raid, along with fellow Turkish students in Voronezh and Saratov, in addition to the one in Obninsk, Yildiz was quoted as saying by the Meduza.io news portal.

The Foreign Ministry's statement quoted President Vladimir Putin as saying the “Russian leadership does not equate the ruling elite of Turkey with the people of that country,” and urged against targeting Turkish students during the dispute.

“We believe that if somewhere such 'overzealousness' takes place, then people who unleash it should be aware that this has a negative effect on the perception of our country above all,” the ministry said.

Turkey says Russia's Su-24 fighter-bomber strayed into its airspace on Nov. 24 and ignored requests to leave, but Moscow denies this and says the shooting was illegal.

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