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Ukraine Formally Bans Russia's 2017 Eurovision Contestant

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Yulia Samoylova sits on stage during the opening ceremony of the 2014 Paralympic Games in Sochi, Russia, March 7, 2014. **AP Photo / Ekaterina Lyzlova**

As expected, Ukraine's National Security Service (SBU) has formally banned Yulia Samoylova, Russia's representative for the 2017 Eurovision Song Contest, from traveling to Kyiv, where the competition will take place this May. Samoylova is now forbidden to enter Ukraine for the next three years.

Ukrainian officials cite Samoylova's visit to Russian-controlled Crimea, where she performed at a concert in 2015, as a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty. The SBU's official spokesperson, Yelena Gitlyanshakya, made the announcement on Facebook on Wednesday.

Earlier this month, the Russian television network Channel One selected Yulia Samoylova to represent Russia in this year's Eurovision contest, where she was expected to perform "Flame Is Burning." Immediately after the announcement, SBU officials signaled their plans to ban her from entering Ukraine.

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In the past few weeks, Samoylova has told reporters that she doesn't view Eurovision as a politicized contest, and said she hoped merely to sing her best.

Anton Gerashchenko, an aide to Ukraine's interior minister, Arsen Avakov, has reportedly threatened to detain Samoylova, if she attempts to enter Ukraine, saying, "Our Western partners will understand this decision."

Jon Ola Sand, the European Broadcasting Union's executive supervisor of the Eurovision Song Contest, says any decision about allowing Samoylova into Ukraine can only be made by Ukrainian officials. The competition's organizers, he told reporters, "fully respect and observe" the laws of Ukraine.

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