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Russia Is Laying Groundwork for Georgian Wine Ban, Media Reports

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Alexander Klimchuk / TASS

Russian authorities are taking steps toward banning Georgian wines amid an escalation in tensions between the ex-Soviet neighbors over the past week, the Kommersant business daily reported on Wednesday.

Violent protests erupted in Georgia's capital last week after a Russian lawmaker addressed the Georgian parliament in Russian from the speaker's chair. On Monday, Russia's state consumer watchdog Rospotrebnadzor said it was introducing tougher checks on wine imports over quality concerns.

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Russia's Agriculture Ministry is now surveying retailers on the amount of Georgian wine they carry, Kommersant cited at least three unnamed retail and alcohol industry figures as saying.

The informal Agriculture Ministry surveys could be laying the groundwork for a ban on the import of Georgian wines into Russia, the publication cited three of its sources as saying.

Several major Russian retailers told the outlet that 5 percent to 9 percent of wines in their stores come from Georgia.

Georgia was the second-largest importer of still wines into Russia in January-April 2019, said Vadim Drobiz, the head of the Research Center for Federal and Regional Alcohol Markets. Overall, Georgian wines make up 7.5 percent of Russia's alcohol sector, Kommersant quoted Drobiz as saying.

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The Kremlin on Monday denied any connection between Rospotrebnadzor's tighter checks on wine imports and the political row.

President Vladimir Putin suspended flights to Georgia by Russian airlines starting July 8, hitting tourism, another major source of revenue for the Georgian economy.

Russia previously embargoed Georgian wine imports over quality standards, a move critics said was politically motivated, in 2006-2013.

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