The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Parliament Demands Apology From Norway as Tensions Escalate

By The Barents Observer

December 05, 2019



The Federation Council

Senator Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the Federation Council's foreign affairs committee, and Rune Resaland, the Norwegian Ambassador to Russia, had a tense meeting Wednesday as they discussed the countries' relations and the 2018 arrest of a Russian parliamentary aide.

Kosachev told the Norwegian ambassador that there could be no normal cooperation between the two countries' parliamentary assemblies until Norway officially apologized for the detention of Mikhail Bochkarev, who was present at Wednesday's meeting.

Related article: On Norway's Snowy Border with Russia, Unease Over Military Buildup

Bochkarev was arrested in Norway on suspicion of spying after attending a European

parliamentary conference in September 2018 and released from jail a month later. Kosachev called his detention "provocative and unlawful."

"Mikhail Bochkarev has still not gotten an apology, nor an explanation of the situation from the Norwegian side," Kosachev told Resaland. "In the Federation Council, we do not understand the reasons for the silence of the Norwegian [Parliament]," he added.

Kosachev also stressed that Norway's active participation in NATO activities near Russia's borders and in the EU's economic sanctions against Russia have made it impossible to speak about a thaw in bilateral relations, the Federation Council's foreign affairs committee stated on its website.

The Norwegian diplomat was also told that Norway carries the full blame for the degraded bilateral relations between the two countries' parliamentary assemblies, and that it was all up to the Norwegians to restore relations.

"We are ready to revive dialogue with those of our Norwegian colleagues who are interested," Kosachev underlined.

"We consider that it still can play a very important role in the development of constructive, positive bilateral relations that are of mutual benefit," he added and reiterated that he now expects "a comprehensive, clear and satisfactory reaction from the Norwegian [Parliament]."

According to the Federation Council's press service, Resaland highlighted the importance of good neighborly relations with Russia and pointed at the joint interests of the two countries in sectors like fisheries, the environment, search and rescue and nuclear safety, as well as cross-border cooperation.

He reportedly also said that political contacts between the sides are starting to revitalize.

Parliamentary cooperation

The Norwegian parliament has cooperated with the Federation Council for a number of years. In June 2018, a Norwegian parliamentary delegation paid a visit to Moscow and met with Kosachev and his foreign relations committee.

The same parliamentary delegation was also set to visit Moscow in early 2017. However, the visit was ultimately canceled after two Norwegian MPs were rejected entry to Russia.

It later turned out that the two politicians had been placed on Russia's so-called stop list of unwanted individuals in the country. Among them were Trine Skei Grande, the current Norwegian culture minister.

According to Skei Grande, she has not gotten any explanation from the Russian side why she is on the sanctions list.

"It is unacceptable that they gave no reason why exactly we are on this list," she told Norwegian tabloid Verdens Gang.

Original url:

https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/12/05/russian-parliament-demands-apology-from-norway-as-tensions-escalate-a68486