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Germany Contradicts Russia Over Georgian Murdered in Berlin

By Reuters

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The Russian-Georgian victim, known as Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, was shot dead in a central Berlin park in August as he was heading to a mosque. **Clements Bilan / EPA / TASS**

Germany contradicted Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday, saying it was not aware Russia had requested the extradition of a Georgian man who was murdered in Berlin in August.

In an escalation in already tense relations, Germany last week expelled two employees at the Russian embassy in Berlin, saying Moscow was not cooperating sufficiently in the investigation into the murder.

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Putin described the victim on Monday as a "cruel and bloodthirsty person" who had fought on

the side of anti-Moscow separatists in Russia's mainly Muslim north Caucasus region, and said Moscow's requests for his extradition had not been heeded.

"The government is not aware of a Russian extradition request for the victim of the crime," said a spokesman for Germany's Justice Ministry when asked at a news conference about Putin's statement.

The Kremlin did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told Reuters Putin had full knowledge of the case, but that only law enforcement agencies could provide further detail.

The Russian-Georgian victim, known as Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, was shot dead in a central Berlin park in August as he was heading to a mosque.

German prosecutors suspect Russian or Chechen involvement. Russia has denied any involvement and said last week it would retaliate for what it called Germany's "unfriendly" move.

Tensions between Russia and Western countries including Germany, which is heavily reliant on Russian gas and oil, are already high after the poisoning last year of a former Russian spy, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter on British soil.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Monday she told Putin at a meeting in Paris that Berlin expected Moscow to provide information for the investigation, a message reinforced by a government spokesman on Wednesday.

Some German ministers have also said they are considering taking further steps against Russia.

Western nations imposed sanctions on Russia over its 2014 annexation of Crimea and its role in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Last year they expelled 100 Russian diplomats over the Skripal poisoning.

Germany expects EU leaders to extend sanctions imposed on Russia over Ukraine at this week's summit, a senior German official said on Wednesday.

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