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Russia's 'Basic Instinct' Dig Provokes Spat With Ally Serbia

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Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. **Andrej Cukic / EPA / TASS**

Serbia accused Russia of "primitivism and vulgarity" on Sunday after Russia's diplomatic spokeswoman appeared to mock Serbia's president on social media, marking a rare criticism toward Belgrade's longtime ally.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova struck a nerve Saturday when she posted a photo of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic alongside a screengrab of Hollywood star Sharon Stone's iconic leg-crossing scene from the 1992 thriller "Basic Instinct."

Embed:

"The primitivism and vulgarity she showed speaks about herself, but also about those who have given her the job," Vucic told Serbian television in response to the post, according to The Associated Press.

The image of Vucic that Zakharova posted depicts him sitting opposite U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House last Friday, where he attended a U.S.-brokered signing ceremony normalizing economic relations with Serbia's former province of Kosovo.

"If you are invited to the White House but your chair stands like you are in an interrogation, you should sit like in picture number 2. Whoever you are. Just trust me," Zakharova's caption said (as translated by Reuters).

Serbian defense minister Aleksandar Vulin criticized Zakharova for "petty malice," while Vucic's ruling party official Marko Djuric chided: "I will not allow you to attack proud Serbia. Shame on you!"

Zakharova appeared to walk back her comments Sunday, saying in an updated Facebook post that her comments were misinterpreted. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke with Vucic by phone after the scandal, where he underscored the two countries' "sincerely close" bilateral ties.

Russia and Serbia have strong political, military and economic ties due to their shared Slavic and Orthodox Christian heritage. Russia also backs Serbia's refusal to recognize Kosovo as an independent country.

Serbia depends on Russian oil and gas, and the Balkan nation wants to join the TurkStream gas pipeline that would bypass Ukraine and carry Russian gas to European markets.

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