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Russia Expels Belarusian Comedian for Life for 'Insulting' Joke

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Idrak Mirzalizade **Idrak / YouTube.com**

Russia has issued an expulsion order against a popular Belarusian comedian after ruling he insulted ethnic Russians in a stand-up routine.

Idrak Mirzalizade had sparked controversy with a joke on a popular YouTube show this spring, where he told a story about non-Slavs facing discrimination when trying to rent apartments in Moscow.

The Interior Ministry on Monday declared that the continued presence of Mirzalizade, who is Azerbaijani but holds a Belarusian passport, in Russia is "undesirable" — a label which amounts to a de facto expulsion under Russian law.

"The Interior Ministry ... decided that it is undesirable for ... Idrak Mirzalizade to stay (reside) in the Russian Federation for life," it said in a statement published on its website.

In his joke, Mirzalizade had recounted how he and his brother had found a feces-stained

mattress in an apartment whose previous tenants were ethnic Russians, remarking that "apparently, Russians smear s*** on themselves and go to sleep" — a comment that sparked uproar on social media and state-run television.

"In his public speech, Idrak Mirzalizade made expressions that incite hatred and enmity towards persons of Russian nationality, humiliating their human dignity," the Internal Affairs ministry said.

"In this regard, his presence on the territory of the Russian Federation had been recognized as threatening the public order, and the rights and legitimate interests of others," it added.

Mirzalizade had visited Russia on many occasions in recent years, the ministry said, and received a residence permit in March.

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Earlier in August, Moscow's Tagansky district court found Mirzalizade guilty on charges of "humiliating a group of persons singled out on a national basis" and sentenced him to 10 days of administrative arrest.

Mirzalizade pleaded not guilty, but in court apologized "to the people who saw and misinterpreted" him.

"I had no intention to offend, especially since I was participating in a comedy performance. But I repent to those who saw the bits taken out of context since it sounded inappropriate to them, and I understand their feelings," he had said.

More than a dozen leading Russian comedians rallied to Mirzalizade's support following the ruling, staging a concert in solidarity with him and declaring that "a joke is not a crime."

The state-run TASS news agency reported an unnamed official as saying Mirzalizade will be deported from Russia if he does not leave of his own accord.

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