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Kazakhstan Set to Ban Russian Presenter Over Ukraine Tirade

By AFP

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Tigran Keosayan. **Anton Kardashov / Moskva News Agency**

Kazakhstan has admonished a pro-Kremlin television presenter after he unleashed a tirade against the ex-Soviet country over its perceived distancing from Moscow since Russian troops invaded Ukraine.

Central Asia's richest country, Kazakhstan shares a land border with Russia, has a significant ethnic Russian minority and was forced to call in troops from a Russia-led bloc to quell unprecedented unrest in January.

But the country of 19 million has stayed neutral on Ukraine and is toning down commemorations of a holiday marking Soviet victory over Nazi Germany that holds strong symbolic importance for Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

A statement distributed by Kazakhstan's foreign ministry late Wednesday said comments

made by Tigran Keosayan, Russian presenter, film director and husband of Russia Today editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan, "poison the atmosphere of good neighborly relations" between the two countries.

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"I believe he will be included in the list of persons undesirable for entry into Kazakhstan," the statement quoted foreign ministry spokesman Aibek Smadiyarov as saying.

Keosayan made the comments in a video on his YouTube channel, where he questioned responses to the invasion of Ukraine among former Soviet countries, including ally Kazakhstan.

"Kazakhs, brothers. What is with the non-gratitude?" asked Keosayan regarding news that Kazakhstan had ruled out holding an annual military parade on the May 9 holiday.

"Look at Ukraine carefully, think seriously," he said.

"If you think you can continue to be such sly asses and there won't be any consequences, you are mistaken," Keosayan said before adding: "the train is leaving. You can still get aboard. In the last carriage."

Kazakhstan's foreign ministry said the comments "play into the hands of the opponents of the strategic partnership" between Kazakhstan and Russia.

AFP was unable to reach the foreign ministry Thursday to confirm if Keosayan had already been blacklisted.

Keosayan's intervention echos comments by wife Margarita Simonyan, who questioned why Russia had "saved" Kazakhstan by agreeing to send what the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) described as "peacekeepers" during deadly nationwide political unrest in January.

Simonyan's Feb. 22 Facebook post was in response to Kazakh foreign minister Mukhtar Tleuberdi's assertion that Kazakhstan was not considering following Moscow's lead in recognizing the independence of two separatist-led entities in eastern Ukraine.

Moscow's bloody invasion of Ukraine began two days later.

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