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Russia Threatens to Shut Down Bulgaria Embassy

By AFP

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Russia's ambassador to Bulgaria Eleonora Mitrofanova. **Sergei Karpukhin / TASS**

Russia on Friday threatened to close its embassy in Bulgaria and shut down the EU country's mission in Moscow as tensions rage over Moscow's offensive in Ukraine and espionage concerns.

This week Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov said his country would expel 70 Russian diplomatic staff, the biggest number ordered out from the Balkan nation.

Russia's ambassador to Bulgaria, Eleonora Mitrofanova, said on Friday she would petition the Russian government to shut down the mission in Sofia.

"Unfortunately, our appeal to the Bulgarian foreign ministry has been ignored," she said in a statement released by the embassy.

She said she "immediately" planned to ask the Russian leadership to close "the Russian

Embassy in Bulgaria, which will inevitably lead to the closure of the Bulgarian diplomatic mission in Moscow."

Russia's Foreign Ministry will examine Mitrofanova's suggestion and "if necessary" bring it up to President Vladimir Putin, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was quoted by Russian news agencies as saying.

Petkov said on Tuesday that the Russians told to leave had "worked against our interests."

Multiple European countries have expelled Russian diplomats following Moscow's military intervention in Ukraine on Feb. 24, with Russia responding in kind.

On Friday, Petkov — whose party is fighting for political survival after his government was overthrown in a no-confidence vote earlier this month — slammed Mitrofanova's threat, accusing her of trying to "scare the Bulgarian people."

"Diplomats should not give ultimatums to the Bulgarian state... What I have said clearly is that diplomatic relations should continue," he told reporters.

On Thursday, Mitrofanova told Bulgaria's public television BNT when asked for Moscow's possible responses that public relations could even be cut.

The EU said it regretted "the unjustified threat" to sever diplomatic ties, calling it "a disproportionate step" that "would only serve to further isolate it (Russia) internationally," according to the press office of the bloc's top diplomat Josep Borrell.

NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said its members "strongly condemn Russia's long-standing pattern of coercive behavior, attempts to interfere in our democratic processes and institutions and to target the security of our citizens."

Bulgaria already expelled 10 Russian diplomats in March over Moscow's offensive in Ukraine.

The EU and NATO member — once a staunch ally of the Soviet Union under communism — still has close cultural, historic and economic ties with Russia.

But a series of espionage scandals since 2019 has soured relations between the two countries and seen some 20 diplomats and a technical assistant expelled.

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