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Austria Under Pressure to Bar Russian Delegation From OSCE Meeting

By AFP

February 02, 2023



A 2022 OSCE meeting in Poland. **AP / TASS**

Parliamentarians from 20 countries have urged Austria to bar Russian delegates from attending a gathering of the world's largest security body later this month, in a letter seen by AFP on Thursday.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)'s parliamentary assembly is to be held in Vienna on Feb. 23-24, the one-year anniversary of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Parliamentarians from 15 EU countries as well as Canada, Georgia, Iceland, the U.K. and Ukraine itself have objected to Russia's participation at the meeting, urging Austria to prohibit Moscow's delegation from attending.

Russia would use the meeting to "sow disinformation, fake news and hate speech," the letter

sent to Austria's government said.

"The participation of the Russian parliamentarians in the Vienna session ... would be read in Russia as its indirect legitimization and part of a return to 'business as usual,'" it added.

"Russia would find that it could achieve its war aims without risking ostracism, isolation and international sanctions."

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The letter noted that last year the U.K. and Poland blocked the participation of Russian delegates at OSCE parliamentary meetings in the two countries.

Ukraine's OSCE Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk said in a statement sent to AFP that Russia should be denied "an opportunity to make a big propagandistic show."

Austria — where the OSCE and numerous other international organizations are based — is "obliged under international law to grant entry to the delegates of all OSCE participating states," a foreign ministry spokeswoman told AFP.

"This is not an Austrian invitation, but an official meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly ... EU sanctions provide for an exception to the entry bans precisely for such cases," she said.

But she added entry was allowed "solely for the purpose of attending the meeting." She confirmed Austria had received the letter.

The OSCE was founded in 1957 to foster relations between the Western and Eastern blocs and the organization currently has 57 members.

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