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Germany Tells Moscow to Close 4 Consulates in Russia

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Consulate General of Germany in St. Petersburg. **Peter Kovalev / TASS**

Berlin will drastically reduce Moscow's diplomatic presence on its soil after Russia slashed the number of people Berlin can employ in its embassies and institutions in Russia, a foreign ministry spokesman said Wednesday.

"We have decided to withdraw consent for the operation of four of the five Russian consulates operating in Germany," the spokesman told a regular government press conference, adding that "this was communicated to the Russian Foreign Ministry today."

Moscow decried Germany's decision as an "ill-thought out" move and vowed a response.

"There should be no doubt in Berlin that these ill-thought out provocative actions will not remain without our proper reaction," the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

Germany said over the weekend that hundreds of civil servants and local employees working for German institutions in Russia had been asked to leave the country.

Moscow had put a 350 limit on the number of German personnel in Russia, said the foreign ministry spokesman.

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The German foreign ministry "In order to be able to meet the Russian requirements for limiting our staff, the government has decided to close the German consulates in Kaliningrad, Yekaterinburg and Novosibirsk," the spokesman said on Wednesday.

Operations will be considerably reduced and will be discontinued by November, he said.

Germany's Embassy in Moscow and its consulate in St. Petersburg will not be affected.

According to the German foreign ministry, Russia will slash the number of people that Berlin can employ in its embassies or institutions in Russia in the education and cultural sectors starting from June.

In April, Moscow also announced the expulsion of "more than 20" German diplomats as a retaliatory measure for the "mass expulsion" of Russian Embassy staff from Berlin and accused Berlin of "continuing to demonstratively destroy the entire range of Russia-Germany relations."

Relations between Berlin and Moscow have fallen to new lows in recent years over the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the poisoning of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny and a number of other disagreements.

AFP contributed reporting.

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