

Kremlin Wavers on Vow to Protect Detained Ex-Karabakh Leader Vardanyan

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Ruben Vardanyan detained by Azerbaijani authorities. **State Border Service of Azerbaijan / AFP**

The Kremlin on Wednesday [vowed](#) to “protect the rights” of Ruben Vardanyan, the ex-leader of the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh detained by Azerbaijan, only to backtrack on the promise moments later when journalists pointed out that Vardanyan is no longer a Russian citizen.

Azerbaijan’s state border service said Wednesday it [detained](#) Vardanyan as he attempted to cross the border into Armenia, alongside thousands of ethnic Armenians fleeing the breakaway region.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said he was unaware of the former investment banker's arrest when asked by reporters for comment.

“In any case, he’s a Russian citizen, so one way or another we have to get information. Of course, we will protect his rights,” Peskov said.

But when reporters pointed out that Vardanyan was no longer a citizen of Russia, Peskov said: “If he renounced his Russian citizenship, it is a different matter.”

He did not provide further clarification.

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Armenian-born Vardanyan had been a Russian citizen when he co-founded the Russian investment banking firm Troika Dialog and served as founding president at the Moscow School of Management at Skolkovo in the mid-2000s.

He later renounced his Russian citizenship and moved to Nagorno-Karabakh, where he served as the head of the disputed territory between November 2022 and February 2023. President Vladimir Putin [approved](#) Vardnyan’s application to revoke his Russian citizenship in December last year.

Following his detention Wednesday, Vardanyan was brought to Azerbaijan’s capital of Baku, the country’s border agency said in a statement.

Azerbaijan captured Nagorno-Karabakh in a lightning offensive last week, with Russian peacekeepers deployed there after a 2020 war over the territory refusing to intervene.

Yerevan said Wednesday that more than one-third of Nagorno-Karabakh’s population of 120,000 has fled the enclave since Azerbaijan crushed the rebels’ decades-long fight for independent statehood.

Armenian diplomats said they will seek consular access to Vardanyan as a citizen of Armenia, an official who spoke on condition of anonymity [told](#) Russia’s state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

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