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Kazakhstan to Ban Entry to Russian Media Executive Over Language Policy Criticism

January 22, 2024



Tina Kandelaki. **Vladimir Smirnov / TASS**

Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry said it will ban entry to Russian media executive Tina Kandelaki over her remarks about the country's language policies, local media reported Monday.

Kandelaki, deputy CEO of the state-holding Gazprom-Media and head of the entertainment broadcaster TNT, criticized Kazakh authorities earlier this month for renaming some railway stations in the Central Asian country from Russian into the Kazakh language.

"Kazakhstan slowly but surely continues to supplant the Russian language at the state level," Kandelaki wrote in a post on the messaging app Telegram.

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Aibek Smadiyarov, spokesman for Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry, responded by saying that Astana "never forgives such things."

"The most frustrating thing is that in this neighboring country, our friends don't know about our country [Kazakhstan]," he was quoted as saying by Tengri News.

Smadiyarov suggested that Kandelaki would be declared persona non-grata in the Central Asian republic.

"If you don't like someone, you won't let them into your house. We'll do the same," he was quoted as saying. "She won't come to Kazakhstan, but if she does, she won't enter."

Last year, Kazakhstan announced new efforts to increase the usage of Kazakh in the media.

Kazakhstan, where ethnic Russians comprise around 15% of the population, shares a border with Russia and retains close political, economic and military ties with Moscow.

Astana has sought to strengthen ties with Western countries and China since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

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