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Russia Targets Exiled Celebrities Who Criticize War – Bloomberg

February 01, 2024

Russian-Belarusian rock band Bi-2. **Bi-2 / Telegram**

Moscow has instructed its diplomats to "pursue" exiled Russian celebrities who speak out against their country's war in Ukraine, Bloomberg reported Thursday, citing two anonymous sources familiar with the matter.

The Foreign Ministry's instructions were reportedly issued to Russian diplomats posted in so-called "friendly" countries — those that have avoided taking sides over Russia's invasion.

Russia's consul in the Thai resort island of Phuket appeared to act on the reported instructions over the past week when, according to The Guardian, he pursued the detention and deportation of a popular anti-war rock band Bi-2.

All seven members of the band, who were detained for playing in Phuket with improperly filed paperwork, flew to Israel earlier Thursday after days of speculation that some of them may be sent to Russia.

Related article: Russian Anti-War Rockers Held in Thailand Fly to Israel

Upon arriving in Israel, Bi-2 lead singer Yegor Bortnik told the Kremlin-funded broadcaster RT that band members had been told the Russian consulate in Thailand requested their extradition.

Russia's Justice Ministry in May designated Bortnik a "foreign agent."

Officials in Moscow had threatened Bi-2 with criminal persecution following news of the band members' detention in Thailand.

Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused the musicians of "sponsoring terrorism," while federal lawmaker Andrei Lugovoy warned the musicians they "will soon be tap-dancing in front of their cellmates" in Russia.

Hundreds of thousands of Russians, including famous musicians who faced concert cancelations in Russia, are estimated to have fled the country since the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

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