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Lithuania Strips Ballerina's Citizenship Over Pro-Putin Remarks

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Ilze Liepa. **Arthur Novosiltsev**

Lithuania has stripped Russian ballerina Ilze Liepa of her Lithuanian citizenship after she openly praised President Vladimir Putin, the news website Delfi reported Thursday, citing an adviser to the Baltic country's president.

In a decree signed by Lithuanian President Gitanas Naused, 59-year-old Liepa was stripped of her Lithuanian citizenship, which she received in 2000.

"Questions about I[lze] Liepa's citizenship arose after an interview appeared in which she does not hide her sympathies for Vladimir Putin," Delfi wrote.

The news outlet added that the dancer "calls the war in Ukraine a special [military] operation, and openly despises the Western world and values."

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According to Delfi, the authorities' decision to strip Liepa of her Lithuanian citizenship was made on Feb. 14.

Liepa, who performed at the Bolshoi Theatre in the 1980s and 1990s, said in a Russian-language YouTube interview published in November 2022 that she was "ashamed" of Western foreign policy toward Russia and praised Putin for his "service to the Motherland."

Earlier, Lithuania's Interior Ministry had asked the country's civilian intelligence agency to initiate proceedings for stripping the ballerina of her citizenship.

The intelligence agency was also asked "to check" some 800 naturalized Lithuanians for "threat[s] to national security and support for the actions of the aggressor state [Russia]."

According to Delfi, an individual who has received Lithuanian citizenship can have it revoked not only if their actions threaten national security, but also if they express public support for a country that "poses a threat" to Lithuania or other EU member states.

Lithuania's relations with Russia have fallen to new lows due to Moscow's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Vilnius has closed its borders to Russians holding Schengen Zone tourist visas and suspended its issuance of visas to Russian and Belarusian nationals.

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