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Russian FM Lavrov to Visit Malta in First EU Trip Since 2021

By AFP

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Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. **Russian Foreign Ministry Press Service**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will travel to Malta on Thursday for an Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit, Moscow confirmed, his first visit to an EU member since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Lavrov will head the Russian delegation for the Dec. 5-6 summit in Malta, foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters, despite being under EU sanctions.

Brussels hit Lavrov with sanctions a day after Moscow launched its February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine and his visit to a member state is likely to draw intense criticism from Kyiv and its strongest backers in the bloc.

Lavrov's last trip to the EU was in December 2021 when he visited Stockholm, also for an OSCE meeting, Russian media reported based on a tally of his publicly announced trips.

Ukraine is also a member of the OSCE and Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga has been invited to the summit.

Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's then-foreign minister, boycotted last year's OSCE ministerial council in North Macedonia over Lavrov's attendance.

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Kyiv has called for Russia to be expelled from the body, which was founded to ease East-West tensions during the Cold War.

Zakharova said Russia considers the OSCE to be in a "deep institutional crisis" and attacked Western attempts to dominate the institution.

Zakharova's own visa to attend the Malta summit was "annulled," Russia's foreign ministry said later on Wednesday, adding that the organizers had told the Russian side that the decision was "due to circumstances beyond their control."

Speaking at the summit last year, Lavrov said the OSCE was being "turned into an appendage of NATO and the EU."

The organization sends observers to conflicts and elections around the world, as well as running programs to combat human trafficking and ensure media freedom.

But since the start of the full-scale invasion in Ukraine, it has struggled to operate as Russia has vetoed several major decisions, which require consensus.

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