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Russia Bars Entry to Azerbaijani Lawmaker Over 'Russophobic' Comments

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Azerbaijani MP Azer Badamov. **meclis.gov.az**

Russia has barred an Azerbaijani lawmaker from entering the country amid simmering diplomatic tensions, the state-run TASS news agency reported Monday, citing an anonymous source familiar with the matter.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry on Sunday protested the detention and deportation of parliamentary member Azer Badamov, who had traveled to Moscow to attend an event honoring late Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev in southern Russia's Astrakhan region.

A Russian Foreign Ministry representative reportedly promised Baku to investigate the circumstances of Badamov's brief detention, according to Azerbaijan's Trend news agency.

TASS quoted a source as saying that Badamov had been declared persona non grata over his "repeated anti-Russian and Russophobic statements," though the move was "not intended to

damage Russian-Azerbaijani relations."

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The source suggested the entry ban was a reciprocal measure following Azerbaijan's decision in February to bar Russian State Duma lawmaker and former heavyweight boxing champion Nikolai Valuev. Valuev was reportedly the third Russian lawmaker to be banned from entering Azerbaijan.

"Russia is not a proponent of entry bans in relations with friendly countries," the TASS source said. "Moscow believes these issues should be resolved through diplomatic channels rather than airing grievances in the media."

Tensions between Moscow and Baku have simmered since the December crash of an Azerbaijan Airlines flight from Baku to the Chechen capital of Grozny, which killed 38 of the 67 people on board.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has alleged that Russian air defense systems accidentally shot down the plane. Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a rare apology but did not accept responsibility, saying air defenses were responding to a Ukrainian drone attack on the day of the crash.

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