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Russia Summons Lithuanian Envoy Over 'Desecration' of Soviet Soldiers' Graves

By AFP

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The Russian Foreign Ministry. **Denis Voronin / Moskva News Agency**

Russia on Monday summoned Lithuania's charge d'affaires in Moscow to condemn what it called the "barbaric" exhumation of the bodies of Soviet soldiers buried in the Baltic country as a "desecration" of military graves.

Lithuanian diplomat Jolanta Tubaitė was issued "a vigorous protest regarding the new barbaric projects of the Lithuanian authorities aimed at destroying, in the town of Vievis, the cemetery of Soviet soldiers and officers who fell in battle for the liberation of Lithuania from the fascist yoke," Russia's Foreign Ministry said in a statement, referring to the Soviet Union's fight against Nazi Germany in World War II.

"It was pointed out... that the destruction, damage, or desecration of military graves, including those located abroad, is a criminal offense in Russia," it said.

"The malicious campaign aimed at desecrating the remains of soldiers who fell in battle in Lithuania continues to gain momentum," it added.

Tubaitė had already been summoned on April 30 after Lithuanian authorities exhumed the remains of Red Army soldiers buried in the northern city of Siauliai.

According to Lithuanian media, the exhumations are linked to a de-Sovietization law that came into force in 2023 in the European Union and NATO member state.

Relations are at rock bottom between Russia and the Baltic states, which count among Ukraine's most fervent backers.

Tensions between Moscow and the Baltic states have regularly flared since the countries regained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, particularly over Soviet-era memorials and the status of large Russian-speaking minorities in the region.

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