



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 20, 2023

Moscow Claims EU Wants New “Iron Curtain” in Europe

On September 18, Russia’s Foreign Ministry slammed the EU for wanting to create a new “Iron Curtain” in Europe by enforcing sanctions on ordinary Russians traveling to EU countries, warning that individual EU countries could not “hide behind the back of Brussels” but would be “held accountable” for the alienation of Russian nationals.

“The ban on direct flights, the tightening of the visa policies, and now the ‘clarification’ about sanctions, are specifically directed at hurting ordinary Russians by essentially making it impossible for them to enter the European Union,” the ministry declared in a statement.



AP Images

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

“It is now completely clear that the current EU leadership intends to lower an ‘Iron Curtain’ by greatly limiting the ability of people to communicate with one another.”

Coined by Winston Churchill, the term “Iron Curtain” referred to the policies of the Soviet Union and its allies in Europe, which greatly limited the movement of their citizens to the West.

Notably, the European Commission (EC) claimed in September that the seizure of cars and other personal items of Russian nationals was in line with the sanctions enforced on Moscow in 2014 and enlarged following Russia’s military operation in Ukraine, which began in February 2022. The sanctions, which also apply to tourists and people relocating from Russia, were meant to “significantly weaken Russia’s economic base,” the bloc admitted.

Several EU countries have vowed to stringently implement new guidelines on sanctions. “This means that no passenger car registered in Russia will be able to enter Polish territory,” Polish Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski declared.

According to a Commission document called “Frequently asked questions on import, purchase and transfer of listed goods,” dated 8 September 2023, it does not matter whether vehicles were being used for private or business purposes; limitations apply to all vehicles with a Russian license plate. The duration of the vehicle’s possible stay in the EU and the customs procedures the owners would have to follow also do not matter, the document elaborated.

Together with EU sanctions, Baltic states Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have likewise banned vehicles with Russian license plates from entering their territory, although Lithuania agreed to exempt automobiles traveling through its territory to the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.

Estonia’s interior ministry declared that the move by the Baltic nations — which are all NATO members that border Russia — mirrored “the additional interpretation of the [sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation](#) published by the European Commission” on September 8.

Finland has given owners of Russian-registered cars six months to remove them from its territory, having prevented most such vehicles from entering.



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In a statement, the Finnish Foreign Ministry announced that starting September 16, only EU citizens permanently living in Russia, their family members, diplomats, or those acting on humanitarian grounds, can bring a car registered in Russia to Finland.

The ministry subsequently cautioned that vehicles that “have already arrived in Finland and have Russian license plates must be taken out of the country by March 16, 2024.”

Justifying the move, Finnish officials highlighted that Helsinki “fully implements the sanctions imposed as a result of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine” and hopes to circumvent sanctions-dodging.

A summary of “frequently asked questions” published by the EC explained that Russian nationals are banned from taking a broad selection of items, including all types of phones, soap, and even toilet paper, into the EU.

Later, however, the EU toned down the sanctions, stating that prohibitions on phones and hygiene products were applicable in instances where trade sanctions were being dodged, and suggesting that customs authorities act in a “proportionate and reasonable manner.” Nonetheless, the EU maintained that road vehicles need “particular attention” in terms of potential sanctions breaches.

On its end, Moscow condemned the EU sanctions, with Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova denouncing them as “simply racism.”

“This is simply racism. This is not a policy of sanctions, this is not a question of creating some additional benefit for the sinking economy of the European Union. This is racism as it is,” Zakharova told Russian news agency TASS on the fringes of the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF).

“Now it is bursting out. Like an abscess that was not treated and which has simply become a fistula. This is a fistula of Western racism.”

The spokeswoman also pointed to another “wild manifestation of Nazism” by the EU, illustrating a case when a Russian journalist was banned from attending a press conference by French President Emmanuel Macron simply for being Russian.

“There are simply no justifications for this, no reasons,” she said. “Representatives of civil society, culture, and various scientific fields are facing this. When visas are not issued, planned events are canceled, they are not allowed to attend certain conferences, competitions. This is nothing but racism.”

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev recommended suspending diplomatic relations with the alliance.

Russia’s interim customs chief, Ruslan Davydov, also denounced the EU ban on personal items as “utter nonsense” and highlighted that the move was a proof of “total lawlessness” that goes against ordinary procedures for customs controls.

“At least they have not banned [Russian nationals] from wearing pants when crossing the border,” Davydov told journalists, adding that Russia’s Federal Customs Service will not adopt similar policies for tourists arriving from the EU.

Moscow also urged its citizens to “consider all risks” when planning to visit “unfriendly” countries.

The West first slapped sanctions on Russia in 2014 after the Crimean peninsula overwhelmingly voted to join its neighbor following a Western-backed coup in Kyiv. Russia has repeatedly lambasted the sanctions, including those enforced after the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in February 2022, calling them “illegal.”



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