

New EU Code of Conduct Ends Yacht Perks

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Two years after its commissioner was scolded for vacationing on Oleg Deripaska's yacht, the European Union has unveiled a plan to ban senior officials from accepting such perks.

A clause in the new code of conduct for EU commissioners says they may not "accept hospitality except when in accordance with diplomatic and courtesy usage."

The 14-page draft code, a copy of which was obtained by The Moscow Times, was presented to European Parliament members late last week.

The clause effectively bans private invitations like the one that caused a scandal in 2008, when it became known that then-Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson had vacationed on Deripaska's mega-yacht in Greece.

The episode caused a political storm in Mandelson's native Britain, with critics alleging that his close ties to Deripaska led to cuts in European aluminum duties, creating benefits for the tycoon's United Company RusAl.

Mandelson confirmed at the time that he had visited the yacht, but denied any wrongdoing. He said he had attended a birthday party for Elisabeth Murdoch, the daughter of media magnate Rupert Murdoch.

The new rules come as France is rocked by a similar scandal after it became known that the country's foreign minister and prime minister accepted luxury trips from Tunisian potentate Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and his Egyptian counterpart, Hosni Mubarak.

The new code of conduct replaces an earlier document in effect since 2004, which has been criticized as too vague. It was unclear Friday when the new code will come into effect.

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