

Russian Lawmakers Chided Over Widespread Abuse of Diplomatic Passports

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Duma deputies are legally obligated to return their passports within three working days of returning from trips abroad.

The speaker of the State Duma has ordered Russian parliamentarians to surrender their diplomatic passports by the end of the week, the RBC news agency reported Tuesday.

Access to a diplomatic passport features among the perks of being a Russian lawmaker. But Duma deputies are legally obligated to return their passports within three working days of returning from trips abroad. Current regulations also prohibit legislators from using their diplomatic passports for personal purposes, such as vacations, without the hassle of obtaining a visa.

Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin wrote a letter to the heads of the legislature's various

political factions, stating that at the time more than half of the Duma's 450 lawmakers were in violation of their obligation to hand the documents over.

"In light of the deterioration of [Russia's] relations with the EU and sanctions imposed by the U.S., EU and Japan, Duma deputies' violation of diplomatic passport regulations can have unpredictable consequences," the letter said, RBC reported.

In comments carried by the TASS news agency, Yuri Shuvalov, head of the legislature's public relations and media department, said: "The measure is connected to the fact that the system governing the issuance and use of diplomatic passports stopped working the way it should."

An unnamed source in the Duma told RBC that the diplomatic passport troubles could be tied to deputies' forgetfulness and the inconvenience of returning the travel document to the parliament's international office, which is not located in the legislature's main building.

Lawmaker Dmitry Gudkov, who serves as an independent since having been ousted from the party A Just Russia in 2013, said the measure was "humiliating" and corresponded to Russia's "isolation trend." Gudkov said the initiative was aimed at controlling lawmakers' travels, and wrote on his blog that it would prevent opposition-minded legislators like himself from serving as election observers or attending conferences abroad, among other activities.

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