

Soviet-Era Dissident's Passport Renewal Efforts Mired in Red Tape

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Russian consular officials have claimed that the refusal to issue a new passport to Soviet-era dissident Vladimir Bukovsky was based on procedural issues, countering the activist's earlier claims that the delay was politically motivated, Kommersant reported Wednesday.

Bukovsky, 71, spent 12 years in Soviet prison camps and psychiatric institutions after exposing the use of psychiatric imprisonment against political prisoners. Negotiations between the Soviet Union and the U.S. in 1976 led to his release.

Though Bukovsky was expelled from the Soviet Union following his release, and has resided in the U.K. ever since, he was never stripped of his Soviet citizenship, Kommersant reported. The former dissident received a Russian passport in 1992.

Bukovsky applied to renew his Russian passport in March but has yet to receive the document from the Russian Consulate in London.

"The situation is changing there, and Soviet times are returning. ... Of course they don't need [former dissidents] and our experience," Bukovsky said in comments to RFE/RL last week.

However, an unnamed source at the Russian Consulate in London told Kommersant that the delay in renewing Bukovsky's passport was procedural.

Citing substandard registration requirements for passport applicants in the 1990s, the source told Kommersant that Russians with lapsed passports would now be required to undergo citizenship verification as a matter of course. Consular officials have accordingly begun probing whether Bukovsky is in fact a Russian citizen.

When news broke last week of Bukovsky's passport woes, State Duma Deputy Dmitry Gudkov sent Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov a letter requesting his personal assurance that the aging ex-dissident would receive a new passport, and asking him to order his officials to "stop violating" Bukovsky's rights, according to his blog post on the website of Ekho Moskvyy radio station.

Mikhail Fedotov, head of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, said he was certain the situation would be promptly resolved once the diplomatic service and the Federal Migration Service located documents confirming Bukovsky's citizenship, Interfax reported Wednesday.

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