

Top Official Says Russia Could Leave PACE

November 25, 2014

The  **Moscow Times**

Russia will consider scrapping its membership in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) if the organization suspends the Russian delegation's voting rights next year, the Izvestia newspaper said Tuesday, citing a high-ranking Russian lawmaker.

Relations between Russia and the international organization, created to uphold human rights and democracy, took a hit after Russia's annexation of Crimea in March, a move that triggered Russia's suspension in April.

"My personal opinion is that if PACE suspends our rights again, we should probably think about whether our membership in this organization is really necessary," Vladimir Dzhubarov, who heads the International Affairs Committee in Russia's upper house of parliament, said in comments carried by Izvestia.

PACE delegates are set to examine the issue of Russia's rights next January, in keeping with the organization's tradition of renewing delegations' rights on a yearly basis. The suspension removed Russia's right to participate in election observer missions and excluded it from the

organization's leading bodies, and it also revoked voting rights.

The organization's Secretary General Wojciech Sawicki told Deutsche Welle on Monday that Russia's rights in the international body may be suspended again amid continuing political tensions.

Sergei Naryshkin, the speaker of Russia's lower house of parliament, reacted to the news of Russia's possible further exclusion with irony on Tuesday, noting that the organization had continued to accept financial support from Russia despite its suspension.

"Our delegation's rights have been suspended in PACE, but for some reason they have not suggested that our annual contributions be reduced," he said Tuesday at a roundtable in Moscow, Interfax reported.

Despite its suspension, Russia contributed 32.3 million euros (\$40 million) to the organization's overall budget of more than 402 million this year. Russia joined the Council of Europe and PACE in 1996.

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