

Rurik Dynasty Lays Claim to Kremlin

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Descendants of the 1,000-year-old Rurik dynasty, which ruled Russia until the 16th century, have demanded unrestricted access to the Kremlin in the name of “historical justice.”

The Moscow Arbitration Court held a preliminary hearing Wednesday on the lawsuit filed by the Princes foundation, which represents the descendants of Rurik, a legendary Viking considered the founder of Kievan Rus.

The lawsuit contests the current status of the Kremlin, used by President Dmitry Medvedev and largely off-limits to the public, saying the ancient fortress is the property of the Russian people.

"We want to have the right to use the property, not to own it, because we are the descendants of those who built all of it," Prince Valery Kubarev, president of the Princes foundation, told The Moscow Times in a telephone interview Wednesday.

"We want it to be a spiritual center," Kubarev said.

Kubarev said he was always aware of his heritage and several years ago began to organize meetings with other Rurik descendants. He said he was aware of thousands of relatives throughout the world.

The descendants proceeded to establish the Princes foundation, whose full name is the Fund of Assistance to the National and Religious Consent of Princes. It was registered by the Justice Ministry with great reluctance in May 2009, Kubarev said.

The foundation's goals include peace among various nations and faiths and the spiritual and political improvement of humanity.

Danila Yaroslavtsev, a lawyer for the foundation, said preparing a lawsuit that contested the rights to the Kremlin was hard, but noted that the suit had been accepted by the court.

Defendants in the case are the Culture Ministry and the Federal Property Management Agency, whose spokespeople could not immediately comment on the lawsuit Wednesday.

A representative for the Federal Property Management Agency told Wednesday's hearing that the agency would not give away any piece of the property, Kubarev said.

"But the court noted that there is no document proving that the Kremlin is someone's property. There is only the president's order saying that it is his residence," Kubarev said.

"Well, I can write a different order myself," he added.

The Kremlin is state-owned property managed by the Federal Property Management Agency. It is also a World Heritage Site. Medvedev confirmed its status as a presidential residence after taking office in 2008.

The Rurik dynasty reigned from the 9th century to 1598 and was succeeded by the House of Romanov in 1613 after a period of tumult known as the Time of Troubles. The Romanovs, who were related to the Rurik dynasty, ruled Russia until the end of the monarchy in 1917.

Fyodor Uspensky, a historian with the Russian Academy of Sciences, said it would be more logical for the House of Romanov to claim the rights to Kremlin than the Ruriks, since they were the last dynasty in power.

"The approach is a bit naive, although their intention to open the Kremlin to the public is very good," Uspensky said. "It always takes a lot of effort and time to get a pass to visit my colleagues inside there."

The Kremlin's museums and churches are open to the public, but access to numerous other buildings and palaces is limited because they are used by officials.

Alexander Zakatov, a historian and spokesman for the House of Romanov, ridiculed the lawsuit as insane. "Our psychiatric hospitals are working very well in the country. They [the Ruriks] should turn first to those institutions before going to court," Zakatov said.

He said the House of Romanov has never claimed any rights to state-owned buildings because they belong to the nation, not a single family. "We won't do it, even if Russia becomes a

monarchy again," he said.

Zakatov said the Romanovs do not contend restrictions on access to the Kremlin because they accept its necessity for security reasons.

"It is important for the country's prestige to have its president's residence in such a historic place as the Kremlin," Zakatov said.

The next hearing on the Rurik lawsuit is scheduled for Aug. 18. The Princes foundation is also planning to claim rights to about 60 other ancient fortresses and historic buildings nationwide, including the Pskov Kremlin, which was partly destroyed in an April fire that started in a privately owned restaurant located on the premises.

The federal government is not opposed to historical restitution in principle. On Wednesday, it introduced a bill in the State Duma proposing the transfer of numerous state-owned buildings confiscated from religious organizations by the Bolsheviks back to the original owners — primarily the Russian Orthodox Church.

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