

Pussy Riot Prize Nomination Stirs Row in German Town

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The German town where Martin Luther helped inspire the Protestant Reformation five centuries ago has drawn accusations of honoring blasphemy for nominating punk band Pussy Riot for a freedom of speech prize.

Politicians in Lutherstadt Wittenberg have recommended Pussy Riot for the national "Fearless Word" prize in honor of Luther, a monk excommunicated and outlawed after nailing 95 theses to a church door in 1517 and criticizing the mighty Catholic Church.

Delegates from 16 German towns with links to Luther will decide in November on the winner of the 10,000 euro prize.

But Wittenberg town council's nomination has stirred outrage among many Germans — both Protestants and Catholics — who object to the band's staging of their punk protest against President Vladimir Putin in a revered Orthodox Church.

"It would be a disastrous signal if our town's nomination of Pussy Riot were to win the Luther

prize," said Friedrich Schorlemmer, a local Protestant theologian and widely respected civil rights activist in former Communist East Germany.

"A Luther town should not honor blasphemy," he told the Leipziger Volkszeitung daily, adding that both the band's name and its lyrics were objectionable.

Eckhard Naumann, Mayor of Wittenberg, told German radio Deutschlandradio Kultur on Tuesday that the town would stick to its nomination, which he said had been made democratically.

Naumann said that while Pussy Riot's protest bordered on the unacceptable and had "certainly" hurt the feelings of some religious people, Wittenberg was not seeking to honor any provocation of the church or state but rather "the courage of the young women" who had continued their protest in the face of repression.

In 2011, journalists from Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta won the Luther award for reporting on corruption and organized crime.

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