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Putin Says Russia Won't Return Jewish Library

By The Moscow Times

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President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday that Russia could not abide by a U.S. court decision ordering the return of historic books and documents to a New York-based Jewish group, saying it would open a "Pandora's box" of other claims on state property.

A U.S. judge ruled last month to fine Russia $50,000 a day until it complies with a 2010 order to return the Schneerson library, which includes tens of thousands of religious tomes and manuscripts, to the Chabad-Lubavitch group.

At a meeting Tuesday of a Kremlin council on interethnic relations, Putin called the U.S. court decisions "illegal" and proposed putting the library in the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center in Moscow instead to give everyone access to it.

"Unfortunately, I can only say that the discussion surrounding this issue has reached such a confrontational level due to what are, in my view, illegal decisions in courts of another

country," Putin said, Interfax reported.

The president noted that the collection had been nationalized around 100 years ago and that if it were given away, "we will open a Pandora's box."

If Russia abides by such a decision, "there will be no end to these claims," he said.

The Foreign Ministry last month called the U.S. ruling to fine Russia over the library "an absolutely unlawful and provocative decision" and threatened a "tough response" if U.S authorities attempted to confiscate any Russian property.

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