

Russia Protests Over German Minister's Nazi-Crimea Comparison

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Russia protested to Germany on Thursday over remarks by Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble likening Russia's annexation of Crimea to Nazi Germany's expansion under Hitler.

"We consider such pseudo-historical references by the German minister provocative," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "The comparisons by him are a gross manipulation of historic facts."

The strongly worded retort showed how far the Crimean crisis has strained relations between Russia and Germany, the leading European Union power and the one with the closest ties to Moscow.

While Chancellor Angela Merkel has distanced herself from Schaeuble's comments, she has pushed for a robust EU response to the seizure of the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine last month.

Russia conveyed its unhappiness to German Ambassador Ruediger von Fritsch who, according

to the German Foreign Ministry, was making his inaugural visit to the ministry in Moscow.

Speaking on Monday to a group of students, Schaeuble referred to the arguments used by President Vladimir Putin to justify the annexation of Crimea. Putin cited the need to protect ethnic Russians in Ukraine, something Schaeuble said reminded him of Hitler's vows to protect ethnic Germans in the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia in 1938.

"We know all about that from history," the minister said. "Those are the methods that Hitler used to take over the Sudetenland."

Hitler first annexed parts of Czechoslovakia where some 3 million German-speakers were living, and a year later invaded the rest of the country.

German leaders rarely made comparisons with the Nazi era. Schaeuble's spokesman later denied that he had equated Russia with Hitler's Third Reich, but said the minister had made clear Moscow's actions in Ukraine were in violation of international law.

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