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Culture Ministry Affirms 'Russia is not Europe'

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President Putin discussed the plan at an award ceremony for cultural figures.

A state commission working on a much-discussed report titled "Foundations of State Cultural Politics" will release their findings in two weeks, presidential advisor Vladimir Tolstoi announced last week, adding that the basic formula of the report could be summarized as "Russia is not Europe."

"Russia should be examined as a unique and distinctive civilization, belonging neither to the 'West' nor the 'East,' Tolstoi said, Nezavisimaya Gazeta reported.

The formulation of the document was announced earlier by President Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin on March 25 at a ceremony presenting prizes for young cultural figures. "In Russian society, it is necessary to form the kind of culture and values which could buttress our history and traditions, unite times and generations and allow for the consolidation of the nation," Putin said.

While the Culture Ministry has released few details about the reasons for the formulation of the report, the excerpts revealed thus far seem to suggest that the report calls for the protection of "traditional Russian values."

"It appears necessary to include in the draft document a thesis on the rejection of the principles of multiculturalism and tolerance," says an excerpt released by Nezavisimaya Gazeta. "The preservation of a single cultural code requires the rejection of state support for cultural projects imposing alien values upon society."

"The document under discussion is a serious project," said Mikhail Shvydko, presidential adviser for cultural cooperation, remarking on the importance of culture in education and the need to preserve Russian language as "not only a language of inter-regional communication, but as the foundation of a general multiethnic state."

While Putin's government has traditionally supported the development of diverse ethnic cultures on the territory of the Russian Federation, the report may represent a concession to the increasingly powerful Russian nationalist movement.

The report also comes as Putin has expressed irredentist sentiments regarding populations of Russian speakers abroad, like those in Crimea, where Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine after a referendum held by the local government found residents in favor of joining Russia.

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