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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Politician Wants Halloween Spooks to Help Fight Corruption

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Federation Council Senator Konstantin Dobrynin wants to make Halloween a day devoted to fighting corruption.

When Russian politicians bring up Halloween, it is usually to denounce it as an encroachment of subversive ideology, so the following proposal by a lawmaker sounds almost refreshing: Embrace the holiday and use it to fight national corruption and depression.

Denouncing recent moves to guard Russia from foreign influences — a growing trend in the country amid soured relations with the West — Federation Council Senator Konstantin Dobrynin said the moves undermined Russian culture, Interfax news agency reported Thursday.

"These kinds of proposals to ban All Saints Day, known as Halloween, and St. Valentine's Day cause nothing but bafflement," Dobrynin was quoted as saying.

"These initiatives are clearly counterproductive if you consider that our national culture has always drawn upon a whole variety of sources which have inspired a whole variety of ideas."

Dobrynin defended Halloween, celebrated on Oct. 31, as "simply a joyful holiday, which carries no political and ideological significance and is conceptually connected to exorcising evil spirits — which is particularly relevant for today's Russia, particularly in the sphere of corruption," Interfax reported.

"Perhaps it's worth discussing the possibility of granting Halloween the status of the official day of fighting corruption," Dobrynin was quoted as saying.

Protecting the 'Motherland'

The proposal comes on the heels of an appeal to the Culture Ministry from a member of Russia's advisory Public Chamber, Georgy Fyodorov, asking the ministry to ban Halloween celebrations as ideologically alien and seditious, particularly "in light of tense relations with the U.S."

"Unfortunately, since the 1990s, lifestyles and behaviors that are very different from our cultural values are being actively thrust upon us," Fyodorov said, according to comments published on his chamber's website.

"I believe it necessary to give an ideological assessment to this holiday and launch a counteroffensive," he said.

Radio station Govorit Moskva (Moscow Speaks) reported earlier this week that the Culture Ministry responded to the appeal by saying it is not within its jurisdiction to ban holidays.

The calls against foreign holidays and customs are reminiscent of the Soviet-era denouncement of Western fashions and music that gave rise to the widely circulated maxim: "Today you're playing jazz, and tomorrow you will sell out the Motherland."

Though frequently ridiculed in the dying days of the Soviet Union, the view prompted harsh disciplinary action, persecution or violence against those suspected of Western-style esthetic preferences during the heyday of the Communist ideology.

Joy Over Depression

Dobrynin, a lawmaker from the far-northern Arkhangelsk region, said he had submitted a competing proposal to the Culture Ministry, arguing Russians needed more joy in their lives, Interfax reported.

"Canceling holidays that are already familiar to Russians and much loved by most people is a step toward the deepening of public depression," Dobrynin was quoted as saying by Interfax. "And that is absolutely against the goals of national and cultural development of our country."

He said that extra holidays could bring cheer and spiritual liberation "which are so badly lacking in today's Russian society," he added.

In a country where most politicians claim that Russia is beleaguered by hostile Western policies, that might be the most iconoclastic Halloween thought of all.

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