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Culture Minister: No Funding for Artists Who Oppose the Kremlin

By Anna Dolgov

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A visitor poses for a photograph at the Museum of Optical Illusions in St.Petersburg.

While Russia's administration embraces the freedom of artistic expression, it is not willing to support opposition-minded artists through state funding, the culture minister has said.

"The main thing is that we have no censorship in the country, and everybody is free to speak out as they like," Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky told state-run Rossia television channel on Monday.

At the same time, those artists whose work appears to speak out against the administration should expect to fund their work through private means, he said.

"I sincerely acknowledge talent and I am a fan of many figures of opposition culture, but this does not mean that we will finance work that clearly unethically criticizes the voters' choice," Medinsky told Rossia television, in comments carried by Russian media reports.

Amid widespread calls by Kremlin loyalists to restrict the number of Western movies playing in Russia's theaters, Medinsky said last week that domestic films casting Russia in an unfavorable light would not receive state funding.

"What I don't see any sense in, is making films through the Culture Ministry's money that smear the elected authorities," he was quoted by Lenta.ru as saying. "That would be some kind of state masochism."

Meeting with State Duma lawmakers on Monday, Medinsky said the government would like to fix the "problem" of Western films in Russia, the Interfax news agency reported.

"If the State Duma began to seriously review the issue of restricting Hollywood products for some reason, it would be our pleasure [to support the proposal]," he was quoted as telling the legislature. "Let's meet and discuss this. This problem exists."

In fall, Russian film director Yury Kara said the government should "ban all American films" in response to Western sanctions against Russia for its policies in Ukraine, RIA Novosti reported.

His calls were echoed by director Stanislav Govorukhin, who said it would be "good to limit Hollywood films on Russian screens," but expand the share of European and Asian movies, TASS reported.

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