The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Prosecutors in Russia's Far East Want Chinese Culture Center Shut Down

By Ivan Nechepurenko

July 27, 2015



The Confucius Institute branch in question employs 11 native Chinese teachers, four of whom are volunteers, according to its website.

Prosecutors in Russia's far eastern city of Blagoveshchensk have asked the city court to shut down a local branch of the Confucius Institute, an organization that promotes Chinese language and culture abroad, on the grounds that it is not registered correctly with the authorities, the court said in a statement Monday.

One of 18 branches of the organization in Russia, the Blagoveshchensk office was working within the Blagoveshchensk State Pedagogical University (BSPU).

In his statement to the court, the Blagoveshchensk prosecutor said that instead of being a part of the university, the institute, which offers courses, lectures, books and multimedia materials about Chinese language and culture, should acquire its own formal registration as a foreign cultural center.

The institute is violating Russian law by not being registered as a non-commercial organization or being part of the tax registry, and there are no legal grounds for foreign teachers to work there, the prosecutor said in his complaint, according to a statement published Monday on the court's website.

The Confucius Institute branch in question employs 11 native Chinese teachers, four of whom are volunteers, according to its website.

The situation was due to be discussed in Beijing on Monday at a meeting between representatives of the Russian and Chinese education ministries, the institute's director Nikolai Kukharenko told The Moscow Times.

The BSPU has already sent the prosecutors its explanations of the institute's status. In one of them, quoted by the Amur.info news website, the BSPU argues that the Confucius Institute is an integrated part of the university run as a joint project with Heihe University in China, which is situated just across the Amur River.

“The institute's activities do not pose any threat to the social and political structure of Russia,” the BSPU's statement said.

The Confucius Institute is affiliated with the Chinese government. It is often compared to institutions such as the British Council, Germany's Goethe Institute or France's Alliance Francaise.

The British Council was forced to close its branches in St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg in 2008 over a dispute with Russian authorities over its status, and was soon after accused by then-First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev of working as a cover for espionage activities. The main office in Moscow remains open.

Moscow and Beijing have seen a period of rapprochement in their bilateral relations amid what analysts say is a turn to the east by Russia following a deep crisis in relations with the West over the Ukraine conflict.

The court will hear the case on Aug. 4.

Contact the author at i.nechepurenko@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/07/27/prosecutors-in-russias-far-east-want-chinese-culture-center-shut-down-a48549