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Russian Region Bans British Historian's Books

By Anna Dolgov

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The Sverdlovsk regional government has ordered local schools to remove renowned British historian Antony Beevor's books about World War II from their library shelves, accusing him of "promoting stereotypes formed during the Third Reich."

Sverdlovsk's Education Ministry has "received information" that some schools in the Ural Mountains region carry Beevor's books, and has ordered the volumes to be "barred from access by students or faculty, the ministry said in a letter to school principals published by local news site E1.ru on Tuesday.

The books, published by George Soros' Open Society Foundations, are "promoting stereotypes formed during the times of the Third Reich," the ministry said.

The Federation Council, the upper chamber of Russia's parliament, has placed the Open Society Foundations on its "patriotic stop-list" of foreign nongovernmental organizations that senators said should be declared "undesirable" and banned from the country under a recently passed law.

Beevor's books, which include "Stalingrad," "Berlin: The Downfall 1945," and "The Second World War," have earned him international fame, although they have also brought the author his share of criticism for dwelling on painfully macabre topics — such as cannibalism by Japanese soldiers in Southeast Asia.

Fellow historian Niall Ferguson has accused Beevor of writing war pornography, but Beevor countered that "one has to try to understand these things," Britain's The Telegraph reported.

The parts of Beevor's books that some Russians have taken issue with are accounts of the rape of German women by advancing Red Army soldiers.

In a recent interview with Russia's Afisha-Vozdukh art news portal, Beevor said the critics were poorly informed.

"I was, of course, angered by those who called my book 'Goebbels propaganda,' failing to understand that the majority of the documents I studied were Soviet, and not at all German," he was quoted as saying.

But referring to Soviet archives may no longer be a valid defense in Russia, where the government is growing increasingly protective of its official, glamorized version of the Red Army's actions in World War II.

Russia's state archive service this summer published a declassified memo by Stalin-era prosecutors showing that a group of legendary World War II heroes known as "Panfilovtsy" were an invention. Archive service chief Sergei Mironenko, called the group a "myth."

Culture Ministry Vladimir Medinsky responded by saying that the archive service should mind its own business and stay away from commenting on historic events or archive documents, state news service TASS reported.

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