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Germany Slams Russian Meddling in Alleged Rape Case

By Peter Hobson

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German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (L) and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov

Germany has reacted angrily to Russian criticism of the handling of an alleged abduction and rape of a Russian-speaking girl by migrants in Berlin.

Russian state media in mid-January cited relatives of the 13-year-old girl saying she had been abused by a group of Arab migrants during a 30-hour disappearance earlier this month. But German investigators say they have found no evidence of abduction or rape, and a Berlin lawyer has said the report was cooked up as propaganda to inflame racial tensions in Germany.

In an intervention this week, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused German authorities of trying to sweep the case under the rug out of political correctness and said Moscow was now working with the family's lawyer. “The girl didn't disappear voluntarily,” he said, Interfax reported.

That led to a sharp response from Berlin, where Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on Wednesday warned against using the case "for political propaganda and to interfere and inflame the already complex discussion over migrants in Germany."

"I can only recommend to Russian authorities that they look at the results of the investigation," news agency Deutsche Welle quoted him as saying.

The report of the supposed abduction and rape was aired by Russia's Channel One at a time when many in Germany were already on edge over migrants flooding into the country. Hundreds of women reported sexual assaults by a group of mainly Arab and North African men in Cologne on New Year's Eve.

Millions of Russian speakers living in Germany have access to Russian state television, according to Deutsche Welle, and hundreds demonstrated last weekend against violence perpetrated by foreigners.

The report ties into a rolling theme on Russian state television that portrays the continent as riven with social dysfunction.

It has been compared to an infamous Channel One dispatch from eastern Ukraine in 2014, which offered an eyewitness account of the public crucifixion of a 3-year-old boy by Ukrainian soldiers. The report was exposed as a fraud. Channel One never apologized.

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