

Co-Founder of Russia's Dissernet Accused of Tax Evasion

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Andrei Zayakin

A Russian politician who was accused of large-scale plagiarism in his graduate theses appealed to the Investigative Committee to investigate for possible tax evasion a co-founder of the respected Dissernet group that exposed the alleged intellectual fraud, the Izvestia daily reported Tuesday.

The Dissernet co-founder, Andrei Zayakin, scoffed at the accusations later in the day, saying on his Facebook page that lately he has been living, working and paying taxes in Europe for more than six months each year, which exempts him from paying taxes in Russia.

“Specially for other patients of Dissernet who took offense, I am going to clarify for those who try to snitch on me: As long as I haven't returned to Russia, I have been reporting to Russia's tax service that I'm a non-resident and have been sending copies of Sheremetyevo [airport] stamps in my passport,” Zayakin wrote.

The complaint to the Investigative Committee was filed by Oleg Mitvol, a leader of the

environmentalist movement “Green Initiative,” Izvestia reported.

Zayakin “is pointing out who has improper borrowings in their dissertations, how many [borrowings], and where [in the text], but meanwhile he considers it beneath him to obey tax laws,” Mitvol was quoted as saying.

Dissernet has published two reports, exposing Mitvol's graduate thesis — an equivalent of a PhD degree in the U.S. — and his additional thesis for a more advanced title, known as the “doctor of science” in Russia, as having been mostly lifted from other sources.

Mitvol defended his graduate thesis in 2002, after having made a career as an entrepreneur, and his advanced thesis in 2004 — the year he started working for Russia's government as a deputy chief of environmental watchdog Rosprirodnadzor.

In Moscow, Mitvol might be best-known for his stint as chief of the capital's northern district administration — a job he held from mid-2009 to late 2010.

He took a number memorable actions in that position — such as forcing a Moscow steakhouse called “Anti-Soviet Shashlychnaya [BBQ]” remove the jocular political term from its name.

The “Anti-Soviet” moniker dates back to the 1950s, when Russians gave that unofficial nickname to a diner located at the same spot as the recent steakhouse — because it was across the street from the “Sovetskaya,” or “Soviet,” hotel.

Mitvol said he was acting on a request by the chief of a Moscow veterans' association, who complained that the steakhouse name offends war veterans “who treat the Soviet period of our history with respect,” and demanded the “inappropriate political pun” to be removed from the restaurant's name, the Kommersant business daily reported at that time.

“We will not tolerate such a treatment of veterans' memory,” Mitvol was quoted as saying.

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