The Moscow Times
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Kaliningrad Court Declares German-Russian House a 'Foreign Agent'

By Daniel Armstrong

April 27, 2016



The Kaliningrad Central Regional Court has declared the "German-Russian House" cultural-educational center a "foreign agent," the MediaZone news agency reported Wednesday.

A investigation by the regional Justice Ministry found that the center to be involved in "political activities" while receiving money from abroad.

Critics of the move say that the decision is linked to guest speakers at the cultural center who have criticized Russian policies. In August 2014, German diplomat Daniel Lissner used an event at the center to attack Russia's annexation of Crimea.

"The annexation of Crimea by Russia is an obvious violation of international law which we absolutely condemn. Russia's attack in eastern Ukraine obliterates the trust we have built over the decades," the diplomat said.

The German Consulate in Kaliningrad later presented authorities with a written apology.

Justice Ministry workers said that the alleged political activity included promoting the work of poet Agnes Miegel, a German poet born in Kaliningrad. Born in 1879, Miegel signed a pledge of allegiance to Adolf Hitler and joined the National Socialist German Workers' Party in 1939.

The Justice Ministry said they believed such events "could popularize Nazi ideology."

A plaque in Miegel's memory appeared on her house in Kaliningrad in 1992 but was taken down by request of the prosecutor general as it "violated legislation on anti-extremist activity."

The German-Russian House is financed by a German agency. From 2012 until 2014, the center received close to 30 million rubles ($459,000.)

Under Russian law, any NGO benefiting from foreign money while taking part in loosely-defined political activity must declare itself a foreign agent. The label dates back to the Soviet era and has espionage connotations.

The German-Russian House is appealing the decision.

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Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/04/27/kaliningrad-court-declares-german-russian-house-a-foreign-agent-a52705