The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

British Historian Caught in Ukraine-Russia Spat Accuses Both Sides of Spreading 'Propaganda'

By Katie Marie Davies

February 14, 2017



A view of Cape Aya, Crimea. **Mmother Nnature / Wikicommons**

The British historian at the heart of the latest diplomatic spat to hit Russia and Ukraine has accused both sides of "greatly exaggerating" his contentious trip to Crimea for propaganda purposes.

A war of words exploded between Russian and Ukrainian officials after a team of three British historians and archeologists visited the annexed peninsula last week.

While Crimeans lauded the trip as a sign that European tourists were returning to the annexed peninsula, the Ukrainian Embassy in the UK denounced the trip as illegal.

One of the men at the heart of the debate said that the issue has been “overblown” – and that both Crimea and Kiev had used the trip to suit their own political needs.

Related article: Crimean Treasure Trove to Be Returned to Ukraine, Court Rules

“There’s distortion on both sides,” historian Neil Faulkner told The Moscow Times. He said that delegation had only just begun to investigate possible dig sites for archaeological research in the area.

“It seems that Russia used the trip as its propaganda, and then Ukraine used it for its own propaganda in response," Faulker said. "I understand why that happened. But we are not a party to this ‘neo-Cold War’, or this proxy war, which is what the conflict in Ukraine is.”

Faulkner added that the group had hoped to establish contacts with Russian officials during the trip, but that any final agreement was still a long way off. “It’s going to be very difficult for us to get backing while sanctions are in place,” he said.

Related article: Crimea Sees Sharp Drop in Russian Tourists

The historian did confirm that the Russian press had mistakenly named the other two men on the trip – Patrick Mercer and Roger Ward – as academics linked to University of Bristol. Neither are linked to the academic institution.

Faulkner also denied telling Russian media that the University of Bristol was ready to back the project. He said while he hoped the university would back the project when their proposals were finalized, “no formal agreement was in place.”

In a statement, the University of Bristol confirmed that they were not linked to any planned project. “We can confirm that the University of Bristol is not planning any work or partnership in Crimea related to excavations linked with the Crimean War and that the gentlemen pictured in Russian media are not academics from the University of Bristol,” said spokesperson Richard Cottle.

Crimean officials meanwhile, are still launching pointed comments at their Ukrainian counterparts. The peninsula's chief of tourism, Alexey Chernyak, who personally greeted the academics outside the regional parliament, has vowed that the research project will take place. “No [Ukrainian] protests or threats will not stop these British archaeologists, who were warned to expect a possibly aggressive action from Ukraine before setting foot on Crimean soil,” he said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/02/14/historian-caught-in-latest-ukraine-russia-row-accuses-both-sides-of-propoganda-a57143