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Russia Launches Program to Return Students From U.K. and Other 'Unfriendly Countries'

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Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency

A Russian government agency tasked with promoting the country's image abroad has launched a program to encourage Russian students studying in Britain and other "unfriendly countries" to return home.

Russia's relations with the West reached a new low last month after the U.K. accused Moscow of poisoning a former double agent in England. The charge, denied by Russia, triggered a series of diplomatic expulsions including the head of the Rossotrudnichestvo cultural center in the United States.

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Rossotrudnichestvo announced on Monday the launch of the "Highly Likely Welcome Back"

program to encourage the 60,000 Russians that are estimated to be studying abroad to continue their studies back home.

"There is serious concern that young Russians may suffer from provocations in countries that express unfriendly attitudes towards our country," the moderator of the program's opening session was cited as saying by the Kommersant business daily.

A Rossotrudnichestvo representative said that the program was primarily designed to return Russians studying in Great Britain and bears "a humorous name," playing on British Prime Minister Theresa May's use of the phrase "highly likely" to lay blame on Russia for March's poisoning in England.

Meanwhile, Britain's embassy in Moscow told Kommersant that the country "is very happy, as always, to accept the Russians that come to the United Kingdom for tourism, education and business."

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