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Moscow Hosts First 'Russia Lovers' Gathering

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Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and actor Steven Seagal attend a ceremony to open the founding congress of the International Russophile Movement **Sergei Savostyanov / TASS**

Moscow played host Tuesday to an event that organizers touted as the first international gathering of Russia lovers as the country finds itself isolated over its invasion of Ukraine.

The founding congress of the so-called "International Russophile Movement" describes itself as a meeting of "those who sincerely love our country, its history and culture," the state-run RIA Novosti news agency said.

"Even in Western countries today there are many people who are not afraid to call themselves 'Russophiles'," an unnamed organizer was quoted as saying, echoing the Kremlin's talking points of a "multipolar world" and the need to respect "traditional values."

Guests from 40 countries across Europe, Asia and Africa, as well as the United States, were expected at the first "International Russophile Movement" in Moscow.

Pro-Kremlin American action star Steven Seagal, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Orthodox Christian businessman Konstantin Malofeyev were listed as keynote speakers.

“I am 100% Russophile and 1 million percent Russian,” Seagal said in remarks at the event.

President Vladimir Putin sent a congratulatory telegram to the “fledgling social movement,” contrasting it with what he described as “anti-Russian hysteria deliberately whipped up in many countries.”

“We highly appreciate your firm determination to oppose the Russophobic campaign and your desire to develop dialogue and mutually beneficial humanitarian cooperation,” Putin said.

The Russophile movement’s proposed manifesto declared the need to promote Russian culture and spirituality, “reliable information” about Russia, and to strengthen “people’s diplomacy in defense of a multipolar world.”

Russian officials' distancing of the country from liberal Western values has escalated sharply since the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine one year ago.

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