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Russian Bookstores, Publishing House Ban Books by Prominent Writers Over Anti-War Statements

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Writer Dmitry Bykov. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

One of Russia's leading publishing houses, AST, has suspended the printing and sale of books by Russian poet, journalist and prose writer Dmitry Bykov and Russian-Georgian writer Boris Akunin over their anti-war views, it announced Friday.

"Public statements made by these writers — which caused a widespread public outcry — require legal assessment. Publication and shipment of [their] books won't resume until this situation is clarified," AST's Director General Pavel Grishkov was quoted as saying on the publisher's official website.

Booksellers Chitay Gorod and Bukvoed, as well as e-book library LitRes, also suspended sales of all books by the authors and are currently in the process of removing them from store shelves countrywide.

“A request was sent to the publishing house and independent lawyers to [conduct] a legal assessment of the situation,” Chitay Gorod announced.

Neither AST nor the retail outlet Chitay Gorod associated with it specified which statements prompted the decision, though both Akunin and Bykov have repeatedly spoken out against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

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Boris Akunin is best known for his murder mystery series set in Imperial Russia, especially the Fandorin mysteries, as well as his “History of the Russian State.” His books have been translated into many languages and made into television series. He has won several literary awards both in Russia and abroad. He now lives in London.

Bykov is one of contemporary Russia’s most prolific and multi-faceted writers. He has published 12 volumes of poetry, 15 volumes of prose, 10 books of essays and three full-length biographies in addition to working as a print, radio and television journalist. His series of poems “Citizen Poet” performed by actor Mikhail Yefremov came out every week on TV Rain and Ekho Moskvy a decade ago, poking sly fun at President Vladimir Putin and Russia’s changing political course.

“It’s high time to understand that it is impossible to ban a book,” Bykov, who was declared a “foreign agent” last year, told news outlet RBC.

Bykov added that book royalties have never been his main source of income and also noted that even those living in the Soviet Union continued to read banned books by “forbidden authors” such as Vladimir Nabokov and Vasily Aksyonov.

“Those who want to read my works will continue reading them as before,” Bykov said.

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