Russia House

6 NOVEMBER 2023

Pablo Mathis



On the southern edge of Berlin's Mitte district stands the Russian House, purportedly a Russian state-run cultural centre. However, a closer look at the institution reveals a function beyond promoting culture. Run by the sanctioned state agency Rossotrudnichestvo, the Russian House appears to flaunt sanctions and has been used as a venue for events hosted by affiliates and members of the German far-right AfD. Beyond this, the institute's social media pages regularly promote and support the work of various Russian nationalist organizations, some of which have been accused of directly aiding the Russian military. An investigation by the Centre for Influence and Disinformation Research of OSINT for Ukraine exposed these barely hidden details.

Staffed by Putin Loyalists

The Russian House is run by former Rosatom official Pavel Izvolskiy. According to the Russian investigative outlet The Insider – Izvolskiy was once registered as living in a dormitory of the Moscow Higher Military Command School. Izvolsky associates with former GRU officer Oleg Eremenko, a representative of KSORS. KSORS is a society founded by Putin to mobilise the Russian diaspora. KSORS' Berlin chapter is registered on the Russian House's premises.

Sanction Evasion

EU sanctions forbid any monetary transactions with Rossotrudnichestvo, leading to Russia House ceasing many of its activities. Exceptions remain, as Russia House is still permitted to offer services that do not generate income. However, ceramic classes for 30 € an hour and a second-floor restaurant suggest Russia House is still generating income, violating EU sanctions.

Russia House and the AfD

While news about the ties between AfD and the Russian state is nothing new, the activities of the Russian House give a hint as to the extent of this collaboration. COMPACT is an AfD-affiliated news agency classified as "extremist" by the Verfassungsschutz, the German federal domestic intelligence agency. According to COMPACT's editor-in-chief Jürgen Elsasser, the news agency regularly holds events at the Russian House.

This September, former AfD member André Poggenburg led a Berlin rally against Western weapons deliveries to Ukraine – closing remarks were made by the organisers on the premises of the Russian House.

The Russia House's Facebook page also promoted a "peace trip" to Russia by Druschba Global. Druschba Global is a right-wing, pro-Russian civic organisation co-founded by the AfD member of the Bundestag Rainer Rothfuß. Besides "peace trips" to Russia, Druschba's social media pages promoted the work of the Friedensbrücke charity. The Friedensbrücke has been accused of directly providing military equipment, including a drone system and motor oil specifically designed for armoured vehicles, to separatist units in occupied Donbas.

Greater Scrutiny Needed

Just a cursory look into the various individuals, associations and societies revolving around Berlin's Russian House exposes a complex network of collaboration between Russian state officials, Russian nationalists and right-wing German politicians. This, in conjunction with the blatant sanctions violations committed by the institution, warrants closer attention, particularly regarding the political influence the institution helps maintain. With other Russian Houses in cities as distant as Prague and Bangui falling under

the media spotlight for similar reasons, these state institutions merit further attention.

This blog post is based on a report by the Center for Influence and Disinformation Research of OSINT for Ukraine. The full report can be accessed here: https://www.osintforukraine.com/publications/networks-of-influence-russias-hand-in-german-politics

EPIS