
HEAD OF THE AfD FRAUKE PETRY MEETS WITH RUSSIAN OFFICIALS IN MOSCOW

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The head of Germany's populist party AfD has met with high-level Russian politicians in a secretive meeting in Moscow. Petry's office refused to clarify who else attended the talks.

Frauke Petry, the prominent co-chair of Germany's nationalist AfD party, met with senior Russian politicians in Moscow at the weekend.

In a statement issued on Monday, the office of the populist politician said she traveled to Moscow to discuss cooperation between German and Russian regional assemblies. She also met "on the sidelines" with Duma speaker and Putin confidant Vyacheslav Volodin as well as deputy speaker Pyotr Tolstoy.

Vyacheslav Volodin, a close ally of Putin, attended the meeting with Petry

Volodin, President Vladimir Putin's former chief of staff, is widely seen as one of Russia's most influential officials, helping direct parliament's work and engineering elections.

Tolstoy is well known for hosting a number of political talk shows on Russia's state-owned Channel One. The great-great-grandson of novelist Leo Tolstoy holds pro-Kremlin views and has been criticized by the country's opposition for airing misinformation and propaganda on his programs, particularly about Ukraine and the West.

Duma statement

A statement released by the Duma said the delegation traveled to Russia at the invitation of Moscow.

[State Duma Deputy Speaker Pyotr Tolstoy attends a meeting in the State Duma, (picture-alliance/AP Images/A. Zemlianichenko)]

Pyotr Tolstoy, from the United Russia party, is known for appearing in a number of talk shows

"During the meeting they discussed issues of cooperation between regional parliaments, inter-party cooperation, as well as the development of contacts for youth organizations," the Duma statement said.

The Duma said the meeting was attended by Tolstoy, the vice speaker of Russia's lower house of parliament Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs Leonid Slutskiy, and Paul Zavalny, the chairman of the State Duma Energy Committee and the

coordinator of the parliamentary group for relations with the Parliament of Germany.

Zhirinovsky is a flamboyant ultranationalist leader of the pro-Kremlin Liberal Democratic Party of Russia known for populist, nationalist rhetoric.

The AfD and Moscow

Petry's office did not confirm who else took part in the delegation but according to party travel information seen by German press agency dpa, Julian Flak, chair of the AfD's "Bundeskongress," an executive committee dealing with organizational, policy and financial strategy, also went to Moscow.

[Leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and presidential candidate Vladimir Zhirinovsky speaks to media after voting at a polling station in Moscow (Reuters)]

Vladimir Zhirinovsky is an eccentric veteran nationalist who is famous for his outlandish views

There is no evidence that Russia financially supports AfD, unlike France's far-right National Front, but the AfD and other populist groups forged closer ties with Moscow in recent months and its politicians are often cited by Russian media outlets such as Russia Today (RT), the Kremlin-backed TV channel which has operated a German website for the past two years.

A leaked report by Germany's secret services into potential Russian subversion of Germany's democracy found little evidence that the Kremlin was directly trying to manipulate the country's public opinion. But the report suggested that indirect methods may be at work finding "possible Russian influence attempts" being made towards the AfD.

The AfD enjoyed an upswing of support in recent state elections and expects considerable support in September's federal elections, although it has been hit with political infighting in recent months.

aw/jm (dpa, AFP, Interfax, AP)

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