

Russia opposes opening of British Councils

by UPI

MOSCOW - The Russian Foreign Ministry called a British decision to re-open two British Council offices in Russia a "provocation" amid a widening diplomatic row. The British Council opened two branches in St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg Monday despite a ban by the Russian government, the BBC said Monday. Moscow ordered the offices closed in January as part of the broader diplomatic clash over the poisoning of former Russian agent Alexander Litvinenko in London in November 2006. The Russian foreign minister issued a statement on its Web site saying, "Russia views such actions as an intentional provocation aimed at inflaming tensions in Russian-British relations." Russian officials also said they wouldn't issue visas to diplomats at the two British Councils, but the move doesn't pertain to the Moscow offices. The British Ambassador Tony Brenton said that any "Russian action against" the British Council "would be a breach of international law" but British Council Chief Executive Martin Davidson said he hoped England and Russia could continue working together.

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