

Russia closes EU-backed university

by UPI

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia - The independent European University at St. Petersburg, Russia, was closed for fire-code violations, a move some charge was politically motivated. The Western-funded university received a court order Thursday to close its doors following the discovery of fire-safety violations in January. European University President Nikolai Vakhtin said he had no reason to think the shutdown was politically motivated, The Moscow Times said Tuesday. Maxim Reznik, the leader of the local branch of the opposition Yabloko party, said, however, it was "perfectly obvious" officials closed the university because of its EU-funded studies on Russian elections. Some of the EU money was supposed to go to training elections observers from various political parties, which angered pro-Kremlin lawmakers, the Times said. State Duma Deputy Gadzhimet Safaraliyev, a member of the Russian President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party, said the university violated its charter by getting involved in political activities. St. Petersburg city officials agreed with the charge and Vakhtin canceled the training program. Vakhtin said he hoped the university would reopen soon following a notification sent to inspectors saying the fire-code violations were eliminated. Russia has presidential elections March 2.

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