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Klusmann Report confirms: Russian payments made to documentary filmmaker were unknown to NDR



Hamburg (ots) -

The investigation into the Hubert Seipel case commissioned by NDR has been completed. The report issued by former Spiegel editor-in-chief Steffen Klusmann confirms misconduct on the part of the freelance author. Hubert Seipel should have disclosed the cash payments of a Russian oligarch to NDR. Regarding NDR and ARD, there was no evidence that those involved in the production knew about the Russian payments or benefited financially from them.

The allegation that Seipel had the biopic "Ich Putin" [I, Putin] "approved" by the Kremlin before it was broadcast has also not been confirmed. To this day, Hubert Seipel maintains that his Russian sponsor did not influence his book projects or the films. However, the report concludes that the author was "open to bribery through proximity." Seipel lost the necessary distance due to his exclusive access to Putin. The suspicion that NDR disregarded a "warning" about Seipel or Russian influence has also not been confirmed, as there was no concrete and substantiated warning.

Although there was no evidence of NDR employees neglecting their duties, the report concludes that Seipel had been heavily wooed over the years and had not received enough critical scrutiny.

Joachim Knuth, Director-General at NDR: "I want to thank the team for the report. It clearly shows that nobody at NDR knew about the money flowing to Hubert Seipel from Russia because the author had concealed it, and there were no other indications. The report also provides us with valuable suggestions. We will strike a clearer balance between closeness and distance to protagonists in large biographies, as well as between skepticism and enthusiasm - even more so in the case of particularly strong material. I have now asked three colleagues from the editorial and legal departments to take up the suggestions in Steffen Klusmann's report and put them into concrete terms for us."

About the report

The Klusmann Report traces what Seipel specifically worked on between 2009 and 2017 and the conditions under which documentaries and book projects on Russia, among other things, came about. The main focus is on the documentary "Ich, Putin" [I, Putin] (2012) and "Putin - Das Interview" [Putin - The Interview] (2014). Dr. Michael Kühn, NDR's chief legal advisor, who is also responsible for compliance issues, shed light on the legal dimension of the Seipel case for the report. Klusmann and Kühn reviewed numerous documents for the report, journalistically assessed Seipel's films, and contacted around 40 people. Among them was Hubert Seipel himself, who answered questions in writing. Russia expert Dr. Gesine Dornblüth examined Seipel's films to contextualize them in the period they were produced. Dornblüth worked as a Moscow correspondent for Deutschlandradio [Radio Germany] from 2012 to 2017.

The Klusmann Report and Dr. Gesine Dornblüth's expert opinion on Seipel's films are available on the NDR website.

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