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NTV Journalist Forced Out After Censorship Spat

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Prominent journalist Pavel Lobkov has been forced out of state-controlled NTV television after he unsuccessfully tried to broadcast footage about vote-rigging in last month's State Duma elections.

NTV confirmed in a statement Tuesday that Lobkov's contract "had expired," meaning that it wouldn't be prolonged and his multiyear career at the channel is over. The statement said the contract expired this month but didn't elaborate on possible reasons for its decision not to renew it.

Lobkov wrote on his Facebook page last week that his work phone number had been blocked. "I've been fired," he wrote.

He said he had planned to push ahead with work on a series about science, but then learned that his contract would not be extended.

Lobkov had spoken about resigning last month after NTV withdrew his investigative report about vote-rigging for no specific reason.

"We had an agreement to prolong the contract to continue other projects. ... The decision was changed after my political activities became excessive," Lobkov told Kommersant FM radio on Tuesday.

He added that NTV management didn't like his decision to speak at post-election opposition rallies and give interviews to "adversary channels."

Lobkov, one of the best-known journalists at NTV, started his career at the channel when it was founded in 1993. He has joined and left NTV several times since then, including in 2001 when it was taken over by Gazprom-Media.

His most recent projects at NTV included "Professia – Reportyor" (Profession: Reporter), a series of investigative programs, and "Tsentralnoye Televideniye" (Central Television), a popular current affairs show. He also co-hosted a talk show.

NTV aired a scandalous report about Golos, Russia's only independent elections watchdog, shortly before the Duma elections, criticizing it as a Western-sponsored organization.

"Professiya – Reportyor" complained of censorship last month after a segment covering the opposition protests was banned from broadcast. It later appeared on YouTube.

NTV did cover an opposition rally on Bolotnaya Ploshchad on Dec. 10 that drew 30,000 to 80,000 people after news presenter Alexei Pivovarov refused to work without its inclusion.

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