

Criminal Case Opened for Edited Video of Putin

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A Leningrad region journalist has been accused of fomenting extremism by editing an address by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to make him sound critical of the government.

The journalist, Andrei Kolomoisky, posted a video to his blog on the website of the Vyborgskiye Vedomosti newspaper of Putin speaking to the camera while sitting in front of the Russian flag on the eve of the Dec. 4 parliamentary elections.

"Our country is already now entering a period of empty promises. ... Poverty, although moving slowly, is nonetheless experiencing stable growth, and in this case it is very important to guarantee we continue this course. That is why I decided to return to the times of humiliation, dependence and destruction to redraw plans for the development of Russia," Putin appears to say in the video titled, "Putin's Address Regarding the State Duma Elections, Dec. 1, 2011."

The video, which has been removed from Kolomoisky's blog but is available on YouTube, has been viewed more than 600,000 times.

The Vyborg prosecutor's office concluded that by posting the video, Kolomoisky violated laws on "public calls to extremist activity using mass media" and "inciting hatred or enmity, and humiliation of human dignity," local news portal Lenizdat.ru said, which published the scanned response to an information request about the criminal case when it broke the story Thursday. If charged, Kolomoisky would face a maximum punishment of five years in prison for the first charge and two years for the second.

Kolomoisky criticized the decision to open the case, saying the video that he posted did not break any laws.

"The paper, so as not to put up a fuss, agreed the take down the clip. And it did," Kolomoisky said on his blog in February.

He said investigators essentially told his newspaper that the basis of the case was that they "watched it many times and did not like it much!"

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