

Video of Putin Rejecting Priest's Kiss Goes Viral

By [The Moscow Times](#)

August 07, 2012

The  **Moscow Times**

A video of President Vladimir Putin jerking away in surprise at an Orthodox priest who kissed his hand went viral on the Internet on Tuesday, prompting an explanation from Putin's spokesman.

The kissing incident occurred a day earlier, when Putin visited the famous Valaam monastery on Lake Ladoga to attend a meeting of the Russian Geographical Society. Putin heads the society's supervisory board.

In footage uploaded on YouTube by state-run broadcaster RT, formerly known as Russia Today, Putin is clearly taken aback by the priest's action.

After shaking hands with Moscow region Governor Sergei Shoigu and other society board members, a priest grabs Putin's hand and bends at the knees to plant a kiss on the back of the head of state's hand.

Putin then clenches his palm into a fist and grimaces for a split second before reaching for a booklet and looking unfazed.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Izvestia on Tuesday that the priest "is a foreigner and very emotional."

Peskov added that Putin and the priest, Father Mefody, had known each other for 10 years and that Putin had warned him about physical gestures many times before, hence the hand gesture.

Mefody, who is from Macedonia and serves as an aide to the monastery's head, told Interfax that there was nothing wrong with kissing a president's hand.

"We have this tradition in the Balkans of always honoring your superiors, and I always kiss the hands of parents, grandparents and so forth as a sign of love and respect," he said.

But Vyacheslav Maltsev, head of the opposition movement Saratov Region People's Front, quipped on Twitter that Mefody had kissed Putin as the real head of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Dmitry Dinze, another Twitter user, joked that Putin was shocked that he had let his guard down, despite his training as a martial artist.

"As any true judo fighter, Putin is used to keeping his distance when shaking hands. This didn't work with the church. A light bow, an arm lock and a tender kiss," Dinze wrote.

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