

Public TV Anchor Candidates Botch Auditions

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Aspiring news anchors going through auditions at Russian Public Television — a hallmark initiative of Dmitry Medvedev's presidency — have displayed an astounding lack of basic knowledge about current events.

A video compilation of applicants' answers posted on YouTube late last week showed that the most confusing topic for the applicants was deceased whistle-blowing lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, whose death in a pretrial detention center inspired U.S. legislation imposing sanctions on a list of purported human rights abusers in Russia.

When asked, "Who was Sergei Magnitsky?" the applicants seemed to play guessing games, confusing his story with those of many other recent newsmakers.

He "had acid sprayed in his face," one hopeful anchor said, confounding Magnitsky with

Bolshoi ballet director Sergei Filin.

Another said the late lawyer was "poisoned and died in the United States." That he was "denied permission to leave Great Britain" and "got into a dispute with fishermen" in Cambodia were two other erroneous answers.

The U.S. sanction-imposing Magnitsky Act marked a fraying of U.S.-Russian relations, which had prospered under President Barack Obama's first term. Upon the act's passage late last year, Russia countered with its own Dima Yakovlev law, forbidding U.S. adoptions of Russian children. Yakovlev, born in Russia, died after being left in a care by his adoptive American father.

One Public Television anchor hopeful said Magnitsky was the one who "was adopted in America and locked in a truck through the carelessness of his parents."

The video did not show any applicant correctly identifying Magnitsky as an anti-corruption lawyer who accused Russian officials of \$230 million tax fraud and subsequently wound up charged with tax evasion himself.

Russian Public Television general director Anatoly Lysenko told RFE/RL Monday that the applicants' responses made him "sad." "A journalist must be an educated, curious and inquisitive person," he said. "And a journalist must read ... as much as possible."

Medvedev's channel, which is set to go on the air March 19, is supposed to be free of censorship and advertisements, as well as free of charge.

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