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Georgia to Re-Erect Stalin Statue

By The Moscow Times

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A famous statue of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin that was torn down overnight three years ago in his hometown of Gori will be reinstated in time for his birthday, December 21, local and Western media reported Tuesday, citing Georgian officials.

The statue, which had been a prominent fixture in the town's central square, was dismantled under the regime of pro-Western President Mikheil Saakashvili. The landmark will reportedly now be re-erected outside the local Stalin Museum, opened in 1937 at the height of the Great Terror.

Georgia's new, Russia-friendly prime minister, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, ordered the reinstatement of Stalin monuments throughout the country after his Georgian Dream political coalition swept parliamentary elections last year.

On Tuesday, President Saakashvili described the Gori statue's reinstatement as "anti-Georgian." He called for the prime minister to reverse the decision. "I'm not stupid. I understand who makes all the decisions now," Saakashvili said, adding that the statue would

"do Georgia no good."

"The West will laugh at us and turn away from us because of such ideological decisions," he said in comments carried by The Associated Press, adding that the move wouldn't have been possible without Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili's approval.

Saakashvili's presidential term does not end until October, but his authority has been further weakened by a constitutional reform that has shifted powers from the presidency to Parliament and the prime minister.

Communists and other older generation residents share a nostalgia for Stalin, who dragged the Soviet Union into the industrial age and helped lead the Allies to victory in World War II, while many other denounce his cruel repressions that killed millions.

The decision to re-erect the statue in Gori was made by the Georgian Culture Ministry at the request of the town assembly, news site Gruziya Online reported. That decision was confirmed to The Associated Press by the ministry's spokeswoman, Yelena Samkharadze.

Born in 1878, Stalin lived the first four years of his life in a modest wooden house in Gori, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) southeast of the capital, Tbilisi. The two-story Stalin Museum was built beside the house.

When the famous statue was hastily dismantled in 2010, Georgian authorities said it would be relocated to the Stalin Museum and replaced with a memorial to victims of Stalin-era repressions and the 2008 Georgia-Russia war.

But the statue was later found lying on the ground outside a dilapidated building several miles from the town.

Material from The Associated Press is included in this report.

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