

Putin Awards Journalists for 'Objective' Crimea Coverage

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Vladimir Putin has honored more than 300 journalists for their objectivity in reporting events in Crimea.

News broke Monday that President Vladimir Putin issued a decree in April honoring more than 300 journalists for their objective coverage of the events that have unfolded in Crimea.

"I can confirm that such a decree was signed, but we usually do not publish them. Now, since this information has become public, we do not plan to add any details about it," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told The Moscow Times by telephone Monday.

Citing an official familiar with the decree, Vedemosti reported Monday that Putin bestowed the honor on about 100 journalists from the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, more than 60 from state-run Channel One television and dozens from Gazprom-owned NTV television, state-funded RT television and tabloid Life News.

Among the reported recipients of the "For Service to the Fatherland" award were talk show

host Arkady Mamontov and RT's chief editor Margarita Simonyan.

The list of recipients included Federal Mass Media Inspection Service head Alexander Zharov, whose organization was recently criticized for blocking access to prominent opposition blogs and websites.

Reportedly absent from the list were journalists from radio station Ekho Moskvyy and television channel Dozhd, which are often critical of Kremlin policies.

Komsomolskaya Pravda editor Vladimir Sungorkin told The Moscow Times by telephone that he first learned of his award from a Vedomosti reporter, but that he was formally invited on Monday to an award reception to be held at the Kremlin Tuesday. He said that as a “Soviet man,” he saw the award as an “incentive” for loyalty to the current authorities.

In connection with the timing of the awards and Monday's information leak, independent media analyst Vasily Gatov pointed to the Soviet tradition of giving out awards around the May holidays commemorating Russia's victory in World War II.

“These awards show that Russia's political system works on the basis of informal rules and signals. If someone does not receive such an award, this could be interpreted as a sign of disgrace,” Gatov said by phone.

This is not the first time that the current Russian government has lauded state-funded journalists. Dmitry Kiselyov, a television anchor notorious for his criticism of the West, was awarded the “For Service to the Fatherland” fourth order in February for his “many years of conscientious work.” In December, Putin appointed Kiselyov head of the new pro-Kremlin media agency Rossiya Segodnya.

Journalists in other countries have received awards such as the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom, though recipients such as Walter Cronkite and Benjamin Bradlee are generally honored in the twilight of their careers, rather than for coverage of a specific event.

In January 2009, then-President Dmitry Medvedev awarded 11 journalists for their coverage of the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict that emerged over the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. That decree, which came months after combat in the conflict had ended, was made public at the time.

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