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Krasnoyarsk Officials Want Monument to Soviet Dictator Stalin

By Anna Dolgov

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Joseph Stalin (L) and Kliment Voroshilov, Dec. 1935.

Municipal lawmakers in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk want to install a monument to Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, a news report said, amid increasing attempts by Russia to glorify its Soviet past.

A letter signed by 16 out of 36 lawmakers in Krasnoyarsk said a bronze bust of the dictator had already been cast and that it had been funded by the city's residents, the Dela.ru news site reported Wednesday.

The bust would commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Soviet victory in World War II, and honor Stalin's role as commander in chief of the armed forces, according to a copy of the letter posted by Dela.ru.

Krasnoyarsk is the site of many Stalin-era gulag camps, where more than half a million

political dissidents were imprisoned, according to the report.

But lawmaker Gennady Torgunakov, one of the signatories of the letter that was addressed to the Krasnoyarsk regional governor and the city's mayor, instead praised Stalin for standing up to Russia's foes.

"At that time there were also opponents of Russia rising from its knees, and there were political games, and Nazi Germany was complicating the situation," Torgunakov told Dela.ru.

"Stalin had to conduct his policy in those conditions. Yes, it was harsh, but in my view it was dictated by the times, and descendants today have no right to say that that man is not worthy of a bust, particularly honoring the 70th anniversary of the victory," he said.

Torgunakov added that he found it "very strange to see pompous statements today that he [Stalin] had killed millions of people," Dela.ru reported.

Krasnoyarsk's Communist lawmakers had attempted to install a monument to Stalin a decade ago, but then-Governor Alexander Khloponin rejected the proposal, expressing a stern view on the dictator.

"Russia had not seen a more frightening genocide than during Stalin's rule," he said, according to media reports.

But the mood in the country has been changing lately. More than 50 percent of Russians now take a favorable view of Stalin, according to a recent survey by independent pollster Levada Center, while a museum showcasing the dictator's political and military bravado is scheduled to open in the Tver region in May.

Ivan Melnikov, a national lawmaker from the Communist faction and a deputy speaker of the State Duma legislature, reportedly called earlier this year for a monument to Stalin to be installed in Moscow.

"It is strange and even bizarre that a man who led the country for nearly 30 years does not have a monument in Moscow," Melnikov was quoted as saying last month by Interfax news agency.

One of the opponents of the Krasnoyarsk proposal, lawmaker Sergei Tolmachyov, said he declined to sign the letter because the local administration "has many other much more important things to do than tackle this question."

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