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Risque Miss Russia Photo Shoot Prompts Prosecutorial Probe

By Ivan Nechepurenko

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The desecration of the Russian flag is a criminal offense that carries up to a year in prison under Russian law.

Prosecutors in the Sverdlovsk region have launched an investigation after the recently crowned Miss Russia was pictured draped in material resembling the Russian flag on the cover of a glossy magazine.

The cover of the print issue featured Sofia Nikitchuk — this year's Miss Russia — draped in silky material in the colors of the Russian flag under the headline "The Taste of Victory." The magazine issue was devoted to the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Soviet Union and its allies in World War II.

Stolnik's editor-in-chief Anna Reshyotkina confirmed to The Moscow Times on Tuesday that prosecutors had taken an interest in the cover.

"I was called to the Prosecutor's Office for a half-hour conversation after which I had to write a statement saying who was responsible for the decision to use that cover. I took full responsibility for the decision," she said in a phone interview.

Prosecutors have not contacted Reshyotkina since the meeting, which took place last Wednesday, she said.

A source in the Prosecutor's Office told local news website Znak.com that the probe was prompted by a request from an unknown individual who was apparently offended by the May cover of Stolnik, a local lifestyle magazine.

On Tuesday, Stolnik's website had a picture of a different cover for the same issue, this time showing Nikitchuk wearing a red dress against the background of a Russian flag.

The photo shoot took place at the end of April when Nikitchuk returned to her hometown of Yekaterinburg shortly after winning the Miss Russia beauty contest in Moscow.

Nikitchuk won the Miss Yekaterinburg pageant in 2014 before going on to win the national competition in April. She was awarded 3 million rubles ($60,000) and a car and will now represent Russia at international beauty contests.

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In 2013, three female dancers wrapped Russian flags around their bare breasts before tossing them to the floor during a strip show in the Urals city of Chelyabinsk. Representatives of the local Investigative Committee conducted a probe, but did not open a criminal case.

A month earlier, U.S. rock band Bloodhound Gang had to cancel their concert in Russia after one of its members crammed a Russian flag down his pants and rubbed his butt with it during a show in Ukraine, eliciting outrage in Russia.

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