The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Prince Vladimir Statue to Find Home in Central Moscow Square

By Anna Dolgov

September 09, 2015



Following a months-long dispute marked by public protests, Moscow authorities have ruled that a monument to medieval ruler Prince Vladimir will be erected near the Kremlin, rather than the original site near Moscow State University (MSU).

The Moscow City Duma decided Wednesday to put up the monument to Prince Vladimir — the Kievan Rus ruler who converted pagan Rus to Christianity in the 10th century — on Borovitskaya Ploshchad, according to a statement on its website.

The city had originally planned to erect a giant monument on a viewing platform at Vorobyovy Gory, or Sparrow Hills, directly in front of the main building of MSU.

But the prospect drew an outcry from many Muscovites, who said the 24-meter-high statue would ruin the iconic view — a sweeping panorama of tree-covered hills on the banks of the Moskva River, with the university building towering against the skyline — and the City Duma received numerous requests to pick another location for it.

In addition, reinforcing the hill to prevent it collapsing under the weight of the gigantic monument would have cost too much, so the city authorities decided to consider alternative spots, Duma Deputy Yevgeny Gerasimov, chair of the commission for culture and mass communications, said in the City Duma's plenary session Wednesday.

Several Internet surveys were conducted in which a total of 300,000 Muscovites took part, choosing between three possible sites in central Moscow: Lubyanskaya Ploshchad, Borovitskaya Ploshchad and the Zaryadye district. Borovitskaya Ploshchad won the majority of the votes, the statement on the Duma's website read.

On Tuesday, members of the Duma's commission on monumental art also voted for the Borovitskaya location and recommended that the plenary session support their decision.

According to Moscow's chief architect Sergei Kuznetsov, the dimensions of the monument will have to be adjusted to better suit the new location, and great care must be taken in the placement of the sculpture, he was cited as saying by the Moskva news agency.

The monument was supposed to be unveiled on Nov. 4, the National Unity Day public holiday, as part of countrywide celebrations of the 1,000th anniversary of Vladimir's death, but the ceremony might now be postponed for a year, the Interfax news agency reported Wednesday.

“We don't see any reason to hurry and install the monument in a rush,” Vladislav Kononov, executive director of the Russian Military History Society, a group headed by Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky that initiated the statue's creation last year, was cited by Interfax as saying Wednesday.

The unveiling ceremony scheduled for National Unity Day would have cost 25 million rubles ($446,000) — almost a third of the amount listed as necessary to put up the statue (94 million rubles, or $1.7 million), according to a decree published on a government website in July. It would have been financed from “non-budgetary sources,” the document said.

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Original url:
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