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Russian Orthodox Activists Who Vandalized Manezh Face Criminal Charges

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Moscow's Manezh exhibition center

Investigators have opened a criminal case against a group of radical Orthodox activists who attacked Moscow's Manezh exhibition center last month.

The suspected attackers from the ultraconservative group "God's Will" could face criminal prosecution for the "destruction or damage of cultural property," Interior Ministry spokesman Andrei Galiakberov was cited as saying Monday by state-run RIA Novosti news agency. The charge carries punishments ranging from a large fine to three years in prison.

The leader of "God's Will," Dmitry "Enteo" Tsorionov, said on his VKontakte social network page Monday that his group is now under criminal investigation.

Two of the attackers had previously been sentenced to 1,000 ruble ($14) fines on a "petty

hooliganism" charge in connection with the raid, and other members of the group were to go to trial on the same charge.

Tsorionov said at the time that the verdict was too harsh and that the group planned to appeal, accusing the organizers of the exhibition of committing a crime by insulting religious feelings and inciting hatred, Interfax reported earlier.

The leader said Monday on his VKontakte page that the appeal had been turned down.

During the attack on the Manezh exhibition center on Aug. 14, Orthodox activists damaged four works by the highly acclaimed late sculptor Vadim Sidur and a work by the artist Megasoma Mars titled "Beheading of St. John the Baptist," according to a Manezh spokeswoman.

The Interior Ministry spokesman on Monday cited "independent experts" as estimating the total damage of the vandalism attack at around 196,000 rubles ($2,895), RIA Novosti reported.

Earlier, art experts from the state-run Grabar Research and Restoration Center estimated the cost of restoring the damaged artworks at more than 1 million rubles, according to Manezh spokeswoman Yelena Karneyeva, state-run TASS news agency reported.

The Manezh will seek compensation for the full amount of damages based on the Grabar center estimate, Karneyeva told the Interfax news agency Monday.

Correction: An earlier version of this story incorrectly identified Interfax as a state-run news agency.

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