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Russian Education Minister Asked to Explain Past 'Pro-Stalin' Remarks

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Russia's new education minister has been asked to clarify remarks in which she appeared to praise Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, the Interfax news agency reported Monday.

Olga Vasilyeva, who was appointed to her new role on Friday, has previously praised the "efficiency" of the Stalin period and claimed that the leader's purges were both "necessary at the time" and "exaggerated" in history books.

Borukh Gorin, the head of the Cultural Relations Department of The Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, said Monday that Vasilieva's comments on Stalin needed to be unambiguously clarified.

"It's a very important issue not just for education in Russia but for the future of the country as a whole", Gorin said. Arguments used by Stalin era apologists share the same lack of reason as those used by Holocaust deniers, he said.

“[During the Stalinist terrors] an entire class of people was eliminated along with freedom of expression, and post-revolutionary enthusiasm was replaced with fear," he said. If Vasilieva stood by her comments then it was “a bad sign," he said.

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