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Russian State TV Censors Talk of Putin in 'Fargo' Rebroadcast

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Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP

The television show "Fargo," which airs in the United States on FX, is also a popular TV program in Russia, where it's carried by the state-owned network Pervyi Kanal. On Saturday, the website Meduza drew attention to the fact that the Russian television station broadcast two recent "Fargo" episodes edited to remove several unflattering references to Vladimir Putin. On Russian TV, the show is dubbed into Russian.

In episode two of Fargo's third season, "The Principle of Restricted Choice," the "mysterious loner and true capitalist" V.M. Varga tells two men that he likes Minnesota because it's "sublimely bland," unlike the "anarchy" of other parts of the world. "And yes," he explains, "you can still find some relative stability in the brutal nation states: North Korea, Putin's done some great things with Russia. You just have to know which palms to grease."

In the version of this scene that aired on Pervyi Kanal, Varga's character says, "Relative stability exists only in totalitarian states: in North Korea, for example, where you just have to

know whom to grease."

The Russian TV network made even more significant revisions to a scene in episode four of season three, "The Narrow Escape Problem," where criminal Yuri Gurka (played by Croatian actor Goran Bogdan) pontificates on the nature of truth:

Embed:

> This is the scene from Fargo that Russian state television edited to remove any mention of Vladimir Putin. pic.twitter.com/mTivFeQInK
>
> — Kevin Rothrock (@KevinRothrock) May 14, 2017

"When Putin was a boy, he already knew he wanted to be FSB. He lived in the well [sic], kept a photo of Berzin by his bed. Berzin, who squats in 1920 dirt, gives birth of GRU, later KGB. Godfather. And this boy, Putin, he learns sambo, rules the yard school by his fist. You see, in Russia, there are two words for truth. 'Pravda' is man's truth. 'Istina' is God's truth. But there is also 'nepravda' — untruth. And this is the weapon the leader uses. Because he knows what they don't. The truth is whatever he says it is," Gurka says.

Pervyi Kanal's version, however, says nothing about Putin and removes Gurka's allegation that "the leader" deceives his people, changing the entire meaning of his speech:

"Ever since he was a kid, there was this boy who dreamed about working in intelligence. He lived in communal housing, and kept by his bed a photo of Berzin, who in 1923 created the GRU, and later the KGB. [He was their] Godfather. This boy soon learns sambo, and becomes king of the schoolyard. You see, in every language, there are two words for 'truth.' Pravda is man's truth, and istina is God's truth. But there's also nepravda — lies. And this is a weapon, because someone knows, and you don't. Truth is only what exists in reality."

The Moscow-based studio "A B Video" is responsible for dubbing "Fargo" into Russian. According to its website, the studio has also translated and dubbed seasons of "Sherlock" and "House of Cards," as well as the films "The English Patient" and the original "Star Wars" trilogy.

Update, May 15: Alexander Akopov, a shareholder and producer at A B Video, told the radio station Ekho Moskvy that his company had no political agenda when it revised its translation of the scenes in Fargo. A B Video chooses the translations that it believes Russian viewers will best understand, he claimed.

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