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Head of Russian State Pollster Sued for Calling Anti-Kremlin Protesters 'Scum'

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Head of VTsIOM Valery Fyodorov **Artyom Korotayev / TASS**

The head of the state-backed pollster VTsIOM, Valery Fyodorov, is being sued for comments he made during an interview he gave on the independent television channel Dozhd at the end of June, the RBC news outlet reported on Tuesday.

A Dozhd commentator asked Fyodorov during the interview for his reaction to a comment made by prominent television host Vladimir Solovyov who called the opposition protesters the "two percent scum" of the Russian population.

Fyodorov responded by saying that there is "much more than two percent of this scum'" adding that protesters are "people who have no love for our motherland, who have no desire to make it better, who are always ready to criticize, and protest with or without a reason."

"These people, who in reality make up 15 percent [of Russia's population], harbor a negative attitude towards the actions of [President] Vladimir Putin, his regime and partially his persona," Fyodorov added.

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A group of protesting coal miners from Gukov in the Rostov region and Nikolai Mironov, the head of the Center for Economic and Political Reforms, filed a lawsuit against Fyodorov, claiming that they were publicly insulted by his comments.

According to the plaintiffs' report, Fyodorov's words "reflect the typical attitude of the Russian authorities to their opponents, and symbolize their refusal to engage in dialogue."

They now demand a public apology from Fyodorov to be published on Dozhd's website.

The miners are associated with the KingCoal mining enterprise in the Rostov region. The company has suffered several stages of bankruptcy, and the miners have been protesting against the non-payment of salaries for the past several years.

A series of corruption schemes has increased the total debt to the miners to 374 million rubles ($6 million), RBC reported. Police detained the miners in December 2016 when they attempted to protest in Moscow.

Mironov, who took a stand in support of the miners, explained to RBC that in taking this issue to court they hope to attract public attention to social problems.

"For the miners, this is very offensive," Mironov said. "They were abused and degraded."

"They still haven't received everything that they were entitled to by law, and all of a sudden it turns out that everyone who protests and is dissatisfied with Putin's rule, is 'scum' and doesn't love their motherland."

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