The Moscow Times
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Russian Opposition Splits Over Sobchak's Gratitude to Mayor for Nemtsov Memorial

March 15, 2018



Sergei Karpukhin / REUTERS

Opposition figures including Alexei Navalny and Ilya Yashin are refusing to attend the unveiling of a memorial plaque for slain Putin critic Boris Nemtsov over claims that the event is being used as an election campaign stunt by liberal presidential candidate Ksenia Sobchak.

Late last month, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin approved Sobchak's request to commemorate former deputy prime minister Nemtsov with a plaque on the facade of his last residence in Moscow this Friday. Previously, Moscow authorities had refused calls for a memorial site to be installed in honor of Nemtsov, citing regulations that require 10 years to pass after a person's death.

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Nemtsov

“We are offended by the fact that Nemtsov’s memory is being used as a stunt in the presidential campaign,” opposition politician Ilya Yashin wrote on Facebook.

“We are offended even more by the overtures and words of gratitude granted to Sobyanin,” he added, referring to an Instagram post written by Sobchak that expressed gratitude to the mayor for approving the application for the plaque’s installation.

Yashin called on “supporters of Russia’s democratic development” to lay flowers at the site of the new plaque on Saturday, but said that its installation was the result of civil society pressure “rather than the good will of Sobyanin.”

Opposition leader Alexei Navalny backed Yashin’s position in a post on his Telegram channel, while criticizing Sobchak.

“Any normal person should feel nauseous over [Sobchak statement saying] ‘Thanks to Sergey Semionovich [Sobyanin] for allowing the plaque,’ after the fact that it was precisely Sobyanin’s people who had destroyed the makeshift memorials [to Nemtsov] for years.”

“They stomped on Borya’s [Boris’] photo, stole flowers and attacked people on duty [guarding the makeshift memorial sites]. It was Sobyanin’s people who tore off the plaque from the house. And now it ‘appears by the grace of Sergei Sobyanin and Ksenia Sobchak’,” Navalny wrote.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/03/15/russian-opposition-splits-over-sobchaks-gratitude-to-mayor-for-nemtsov-memorial-a60827