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'We Don't Want Protests Like in Paris Here,' Putin Says, Explaining Jailing of Activist

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Vladimir Putin / Kremlin.ru

President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday defended the jailing of a 77-year-old veteran activist over calls to a protest, saying that Russia doesn't want a repeat of events like the "yellow vest" demonstrations that have rocked France in recent weeks.

Last week, Moscow's District Court sentenced human rights activist Lev Ponomaryov to 25 days in jail for allegedly called for a rally against the detention of a group of young people accused of extremism. Ponomaryov, whose sentence was later reduced to 16 days, was barred on Tuesday from attending the funeral of his longtime friend, veteran rights activist Lyudmila Alexeyeva — a ceremony Putin attended.

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“We don’t want to have events that resemble those in Paris, in which cobblestone pavements are torn up and everything is set on fire,” the president said at an annual meeting with Russia’s Presidential Human Rights Council on Tuesday when asked about Ponomaryov's detention.

Putin said that he'd ask prosecutors to review Ponomaryov’s detention, but added that it was “impossible” for him to “question the court’s decision.”

The president's comments came after historian Nikolai Svanidze told Putin at the meeting that it was "a shame and a disgrace" that Ponomaryov was in jail on the day of Alexeyeva's funeral, which also fell on the 100th anniversary of the birthday of dissident writer Alexander Solzhnenitsyn.

The Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights is a consultative body that advises the president on human and civil rights issues in Russia.

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