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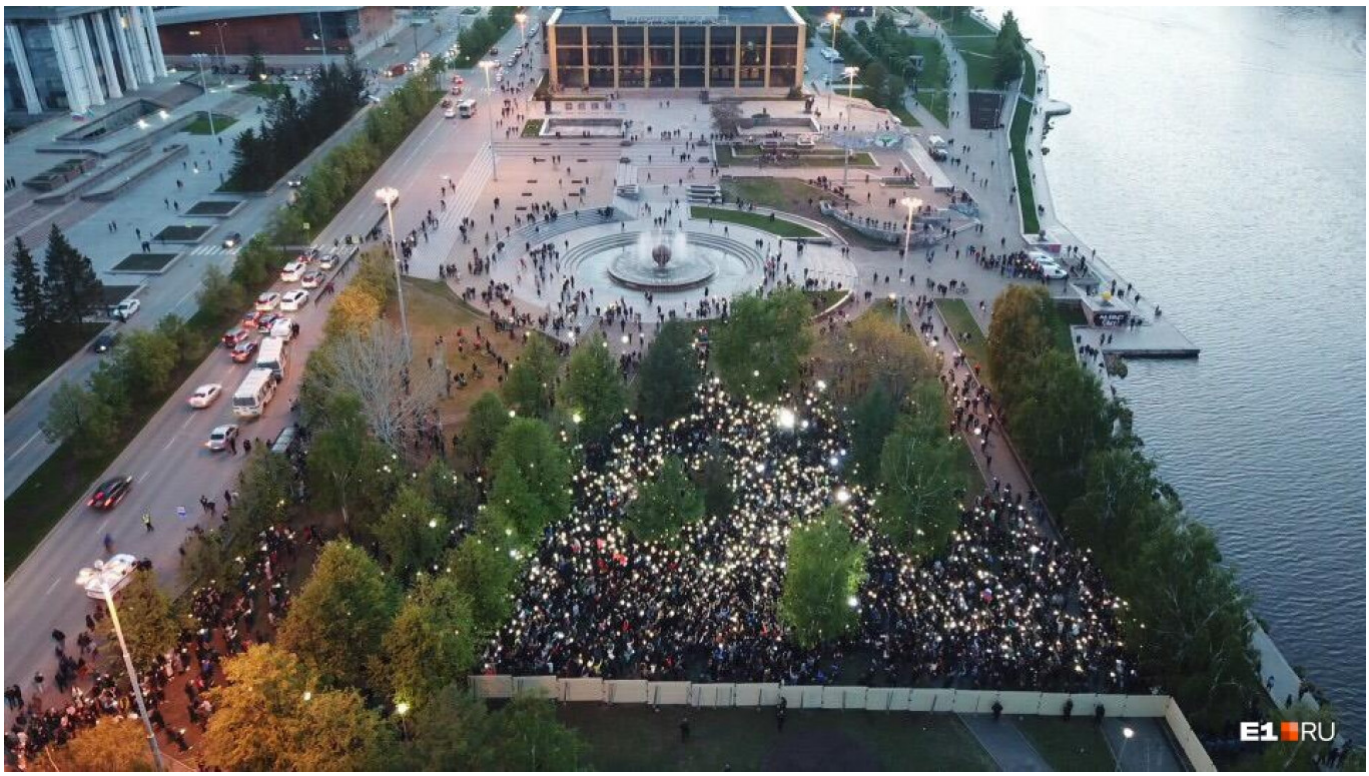
Russian Mayor Halts Church Construction Amid Protests, Clashes

May 16, 2019



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The mayor of Russia's fourth-largest city of Yekaterinburg has suspended construction of an Orthodox cathedral on park grounds as mass protests against the project continued for a fourth day.

Thousands of residents have taken to the streets against the city authorities' plans to replace a central park with a replica of a cathedral demolished in the Soviet era. Clashes erupted with vigilantes linked to the project's investors and riot police, while scores of protesters have been placed under arrest.

Related article: Why Are Russians Clashing Over a New Cathedral in Yekaterinburg?

President Vladimir Putin weighed in on the dispute Thursday with a proposal to poll the city's residents on whether they support or oppose the cathedral in place of the riverside park.

Yekaterinburg Mayor Alexander Visokinsky told protesters a few hours later that construction works will be suspended until the poll results are published, the Znak.com news website reported.

The protests came to an end after the mayor's address, BBC reported.

The public surveys are expected to be conducted in the next three weeks, Visokinsky was quoted by 66.ru as saying.

A poll of 300 residents published by Yekaterinburg's Socium research agency earlier Thursday said that 52 percent of locals opposed the cathedral's construction, while 28 percent said they were in favor of it. Meanwhile, two-thirds of respondents said they were in favor of holding a referendum on the issue.

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