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Georgian TV Host Ignites Backlash for On-Air Putin Insults

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Rustavi-2 Screenshot

A Georgian television host has stirred controversy with profanity-laden remarks against Russian President Vladimir Putin live on air, prompting protests and leading the channel to suspend broadcasting.

The controversy occurred amid weeks of violent protests in the former Soviet republic following a visit by a Russian lawmaker. The protests quickly devolved into a double crisis, pitting Moscow against Tbilisi and the protesters in Georgia against their own government.

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Giorgi Gabunia opened his Sunday evening program on Georgia's independent Rustavi 2 television station with a minute of graphic vulgarity directed at Putin and his deceased mother.

Speaking in Russian, Gabunia also called Russian people slaves and told them to get out of Georgia.

Georgians gathered outside the Rustavi 2 office later that night to demonstrate against Gabunia's comments. The channel went off the air on Monday morning over safety concerns.

Georgian officials, including President Salome Zurabishvili, condemned Gabunia's actions as a provocation against the country's interests.

Russia's Foreign Ministry called the "verbal attack" on Putin "unacceptable" and said it was an attempt to undermine Georgian-Russian relations. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that the Georgian authorities were failing to pacify radical anti-Russian forces and the incident was a disgrace for the Georgian people.

The channel later apologized and the television station resumed broadcasts on Monday morning.

The new controversy ignited as Russia suspended flights to Georgia starting Monday and said it would tighten controls on Georgian wine imports.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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