The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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St. Petersburg Opposition Official Questioned By Police After Ripping Putin Portrait

November 19, 2020

The officers said they "got a message that the commander-in-chief's photograph was ripped." **Nikita Yuferov / Facebook**

St. Petersburg police have questioned an opposition official after he tore up a portrait of President Vladimir Putin that replaced one of poet Alexander Pushkin, Russian media reported Thursday.

Five officers arrived at the Smolninskoye municipal district session Wednesday to investigate reports that deputy Nikita Yuferev ripped Putin's portrait, according to the St. Petersburg-based Fontanka.ru news website.

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> Картина маслом pic.twitter.com/q1uLbPjZMk

— Диана Серая (@serayadiana) November 18, 2020

It reported that Yuferev told police he was "angered" to discover that someone had replaced Pushkin's portrait, which he had hung earlier this week, with the portrait of "an unidentified man resembling" Putin.

Yuferev is a member of the Yabloko opposition party, which last year unseated pro-Kremlin deputies from the United Russia party in central St. Petersburg's Smolninskoye district. The reports did not indicate whether Yuferev would face criminal or other punishment.

Fellow municipal deputy Diana Seraya told the Znak.com news website that the tug-of-war over the Putin and Pushkin portraits was part of an ongoing confrontation with the local administration.

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"Every time we leave, they hang a portrait of Putin. When we get back, we hang a portrait of Pushkin in its place," she was quoted as saying.

Video shared by Seraya on social media showed the arriving officers telling the deputies "we got a message that the commander-in-chief's photograph was ripped."

She later posted a photo showing one of the officers filing a protocol with pieces of the Putin portrait scattered on the table.

Russian government and court buildings normally display Putin's official portrait.

Russia made the "blatant disrespect" of government institutions including Putin a criminal offense in 2019, with dozens of citizens prosecuted under the law. Critics condemn the law as a form of censorship.

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