The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian University Administrator Steps Down After Trick Pro-Putin Flashmob

February 11, 2021



Students were reportedly shocked to learn that their participation in a performance for a state holiday had been repackaged into a pro-Putin flashmob. **Screenshot Telegram**

A senior Russian university administrator has resigned after tricking students into filming a flashmob in support of President Vladimir Putin following mass nationwide protests that criticized his rule, local media reported Wednesday.

The students were shocked to learn that their participation in a coordinated hand- and flag-waving performance for a state holiday had been repackaged into a pro-Putin flashmob, news outlets in the Russian city of Belgorod near the Ukrainian border reported earlier this month.

Embed:

Belgorod State Institute of Arts and Culture vice-rector Natalia Baranichenko met with and apologized to the students earlier this week, according to the Belgorod No. 1 Telegram channel. She allegedly defended the doctored video — with overdubbed "Putin is our

president" chants — as a "social service contract" that she was unable to inform them of in advance, the channel added.

Baranichenko stepped down Wednesday following the scandal, the local Fonar Telegram channel reported. Her biography has been scrubbed from the institute's website.

Regional lawmakers took down the trick flashmobs from their Instagram accounts following complaints by the students' parents, the Bel.ru news website reported.

Related article: Pro-Putin Corporate Culture Behind Viral 'Flashmob' Videos

It is at least the third known incident involving Russian students being misled into filming pro-Putin flashmobs amid mass protests supporting jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny and criticizing Putin. A Russian e-commerce company known for its patriotic corporate culture also published at least two now-viral videos of thousands of its employees professing loyalty to Putin days after the protests.

Observers have ascribed the latest bevy of pro-Putin flashmobs to the Kremlin's attempt to drown out anti-Putin sentiment amid falling incomes and rising poverty.

The Meduza news website reported, citing unnamed sources, that the flashmobs were organized at the Kremlin's and the pro-Kremlin United Russia party's request. The Kremlin has denied involvement in the videos.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/02/11/russian-university-administrator-steps-down-after-trick-pro-putin-flashmob-a72905