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Russia Sentences Blogging Couple to Prison for X-Rated Cathedral Photo Op

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The pair are the first people to receive real prison time under Russia's law that criminalizes “insulting religious feelings.” **Ruslan Bobiev / vk.com**

A Moscow court has sentenced two bloggers to nearly a year in prison for staging an X-rated photoshoot across from St. Basil’s Cathedral near the Kremlin, the state-run TASS news agency reported Friday.

Ruslan Bobiyev, an internet prankster from ex-Soviet Tajikistan, stirred outrage last month with the photo of himself standing in front of St. Basil’s with his girlfriend Anastasia Chistova simulating oral sex while crouched in front of him in a police uniform.

Authorities placed the couple under arrest for 10 months and fined them 5,000 rubles ($50). The court also ordered to deport Bobiyev to Tajikistan.

Bobiyev and Chistova were later charged with “insulting religious feelings.”

Moscow’s Tverskoy district court on Friday found Bobiyev and Chistova guilty and sentenced

them both to 10 months in penal colony each, according to TASS.

They are the first people to receive real prison time for "insulting religious feelings," with all previous convictions resulting in fines or suspended sentences.

Prosecutors had requested a 10-month sentence for the couple under the law that imposes a maximum prison term of one year.

The state-run RIA Novosti news agency circulated police footage of Bobiyev, who said he had over 100,000 Instagram followers before his account was blocked, apologizing for the provocative photoshoot.

Bobiyev does not intend to appeal the sentence, RIA Novosti cited his lawyer as saying.

Russia criminalized insulting the feelings of religious believers in 2013 after anti-Kremlin group Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" performance at a central Moscow cathedral.

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