The Moscow Times
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Top Kremlin Official Unveils Pro-War Statue in Ukraine's Mariupol

May 05, 2022



The statue of babushka Anya in Mariupol. **t.me/turchak_andrey**

Russian President Vladimir Putin's deputy chief of staff has unveiled a statue symbolizing support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the occupied city of Mariupol.

Sergei Kiriyenko gave a speech alongside the monument, which depicts an elderly Ukrainian woman holding a Soviet flag, on the city's Leninsky Komsomol Square.

The pensioner, known as babushka Anya, gained viral popularity among pro-war Russians after she was filmed mistakenly greeting Ukrainian soldiers with a Soviet banner in April.

Russian state-run media have widely shared video as proof of grassroots support for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, with Anya's image appearing on billboards, buildings, and merchandise.

"Babushka Anya is a symbol of the motherland for the entire Russian world," Kiriyenko told the crowd at the unveiling, according to a video posted by Andrei Turchak a senior member of

the pro-Kremlin United Russia party, late Wednesday.

"Unfortunately, we don't know her full name but we'll definitely find out and have a chance to thank her and bow to her."

Russian media reported last week that Kiriyenko had taken charge of Kremlin relations with eastern Ukraine's separatist Donetsk and Luhansk regions, despite usually heading Putin's domestic policy.

Analysts have interpreted the reshuffle as a potential sign of Russia's plans to incorporate eastern Ukraine's Donbas region as part of Russia, despite Putin officially recognizing both Donetsk and Luhansk as independent countries before the invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Denis Pushilin, the separatist leader of eastern Ukraine's Donetsk People Republic, also posted a video of the sparsely attended event.

He said Kiriyenko and Turchak were joined by Russian lawmaker Dmitry Sablin and the Moscow-installed mayor of Mariupol, Konstantin Ivashchenko.

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A similar memorial to babushka Anya was briefly installed in the Russian border city of Belgorod this week, but was quickly taken down following reports of vandalism. A local resident was subsequently jailed for 15 days for the crime.

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