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Russian Officials Condemned for Wartime Vacation Posts

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At least two regional officials in Russia have been condemned by the Russian public and the upper echelons of the ruling United Russia party after posting material from their vacations abroad on social media during wartime.

In one case, a video showing Maxim Vasilyev, a member of the regional parliament in the Kursk region, which borders Ukraine, drinking a cocktail and sending "greetings" to his compatriots from a beach resort in Mexico was widely circulated on local media last week and prompted a swift response from fellow government officials.

"Just like thousands of my compatriots, I'm angered by the video message," Kursk Governor Roman Starovoit wrote in a Telegram post published shortly after the video went viral.

"We live in a border region and this brings additional requirements to the work and behavior of all public officials ...Yes, I am very angry," he added.

United Russia's general secretary Andrei Turchak labeled the deputy's post the "peak of hypocrisy and inhumanity" and called on Vasilyev and his wife to resign from the party.

Vasilyev, who sits as an independent in parliament and isn't a member of United Russia, called the criticism he's received "unfounded and exaggerated" and said that only calls for his resignation made by his own constituents would carry any weight for him, according to an interview with Telegram channel Podyem.

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Indeed, Vasilyev denied posting the video at all, which he said had not been intended for public consumption, and blamed "a representative of Western Ukraine" with whom he had been friends before the Russian invasion for the leak.

In a similar case, Denis Dolzhenko, a regional deputy from Russia's northern Vologda region, also faced a public backlash after posting a photo from a recent holiday in Dubai.

Dolzhenko also received a public reprimand from Turchak who again promised to expel him from the party, to which the deputy responded by calling Turchak's remarks "emotional" and pointing out that he was not a United Russia member anyway so could not be expelled.

Dolzhenko was spotted in Dubai with Ksenia Shoigu, the daughter of Sergei Shoigu, Russia's Defense Minister, according to Telegram channel Sota, though this came in for no official criticism.

Children and close relatives of top Russian officials have frequently been spotted vacationing abroad, including in NATO and EU states, despite the introduction of targeted Western sanctions against their parents, according to an investigation by independent news outlet The Insider published on Wednesday.

In one particularly egregious example, the daughter of Russia's Foreign Intelligence chief Sergei Naryshkin has been spotted vacationing in the Seychelles, Turkey, and Bali since the outbreak of war in February alone.

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