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Russian Governor Denounced for Saying 'We Didn't Need' Ukraine War

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Natalya Komarova, governor of the Khanty-Mansi autonomous district. **Alexander Ryumin / TASS**

A Russian pro-war activist has accused the governor of a region 3,000 kilometers from Moscow of "discrediting" the military's actions in Ukraine during a Q&A session, media reported Sunday.

Khanty-Mansiisk autonomous district Governor Natalia Komarova said "We didn't need" Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine when asked about ill-equipped troops during a meeting with constituents Saturday.

Local activist Yury Ryabtsev filed a petition asking Russia's Interior Ministry to launch a criminal probe into Komarova, according to the RFE/RL regional affiliate Sibir.Realii.

"Fifth column enemies of the SVO [special military operation] are awaiting their punishment," Ryabtsev said in a social media post, the outlet said.

The Kremlin has sought total loyalty as it pursues what it calls a "special military operation"

in Ukraine, which is entering its 20th month.

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The Khanty-Mansiisk regional administration said Monday that Komarova's words were taken out of context and that she supports the Russian troops.

"Russia did not prepare for a war with the West and was not interested in the conflict with Ukraine," the administration said in a statement carried by local radio.

"This is exactly what the President [Vladimir Putin] has repeatedly said: an economic and sanctions war has been declared against us, while the Kyiv regime is also carrying out a physical extermination."

The Interior Ministry has not indicated as of Monday afternoon whether it planned to investigate Komarova's statement.

Russia has launched thousands of misdemeanor cases for "discrediting" the Russian army since lawmakers outlawed the act days after Moscow's troops rolled into Ukraine in February 2022.

Repeat offenders risk being jailed for up to seven years, while those convicted of "spreading false information" — another crime under Russia's wartime censorship laws — face up to 15 years in prison.

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