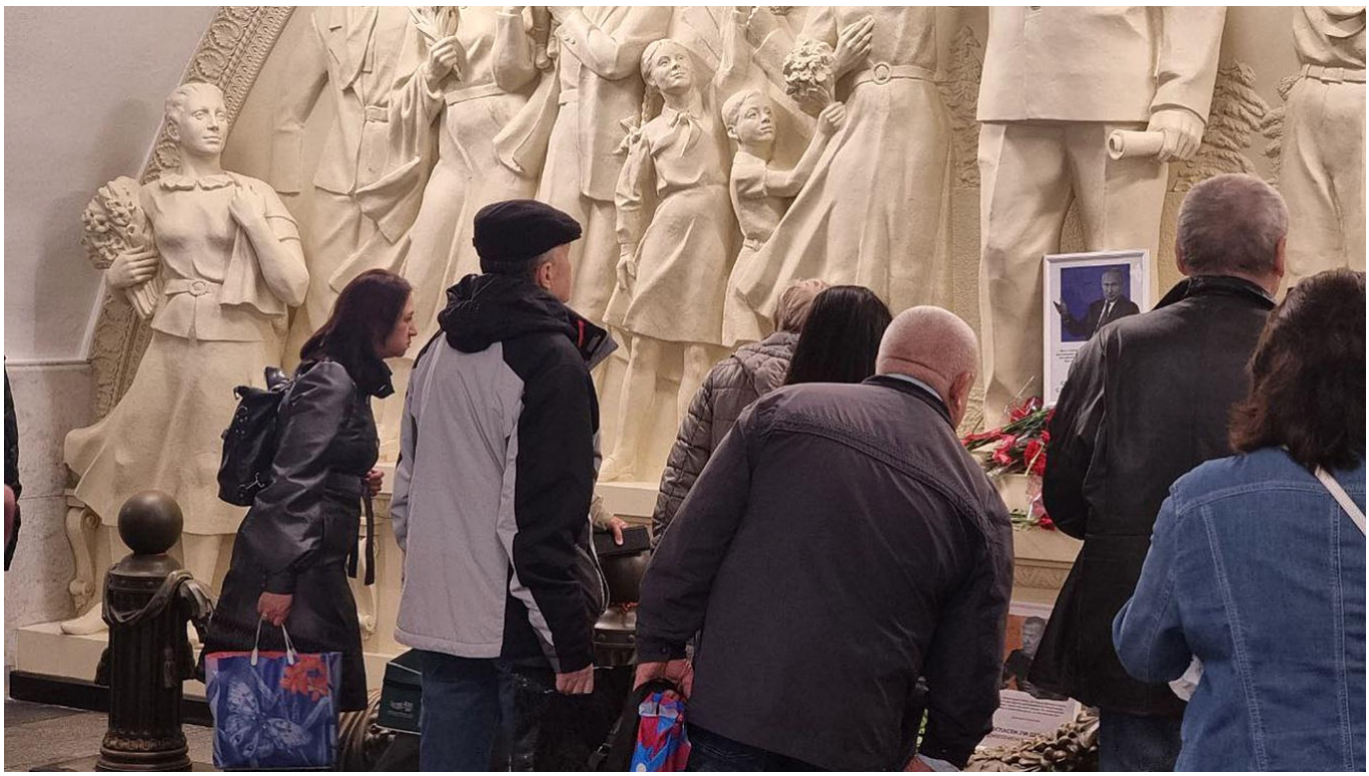
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Moscow Activists Fined for Placing Putin Quotes Next to Stalin Sculpture

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Two Russian activists were fined 20,000 rubles ($250) each for placing framed quotes from President Vladimir Putin and Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev criticizing Soviet dictator Josef Stalin at a newly installed relief sculpture in the Moscow Metro.

Sofya Bezmenova and Timofey Rostopchin, members of the right-wing movement Society.Future, were arrested last week after placing the framed quotes at the base of the Stalin relief.

In one of the frames, Putin is quoted as saying: "All the progress was achieved at an unacceptable cost. Achieving results through repression is unacceptable. During that period [of Stalin's rule], there wasn't just a cult of personality — there were also mass crimes committed against the people."

According to the exiled news outlet Meduza, the Kremlin leader made those remarks during his annual Direct Line show in 2009.

After the Putin quote, the frame reads: “Does the Moscow Transportation Department agree with Vladimir Putin/Dmitry Medvedev?”

Related article: Stalin Is Making a Comeback in Russia. Here's Why.

Moscow’s Tverskoy District Court found Bezmenova and Rostopchin guilty of violating protest laws and issued the maximum fine for an administrative offense. Bezmenova said she had expected a fine, but was still “pissed off.”

“Public discussion around a tyrant should in no way be blocked using Stalin-era methods,” the Society.Future movement said in a statement on Friday. “We condemn the repression of public discussion and demand that all participants in public actions be free of the fear of going back to 1937.”

Their lawyer, Matvei Tzen, said both fines would be appealed.

Stalin’s image has gradually returned to public spaces in Russia despite his purges and the estimated deaths of millions under his rule. Independent media estimate that the vast majority of Russia’s 120 existing Stalin monuments were erected during Putin’s 25-year rule.

The Moscow Metro unveiled the replica of the Stalin relief sculpture at Taganskaya Station earlier this month. The original was installed in 1950 and removed during the Soviet Union’s de-Stalinization campaign in the 1960s.

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