

New Bid to Erect Tsereteli Statue in Puerto Rico

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President Dmitry Medvedev applauding Zurab Tsereteli after presenting him Monday with an Order for Services to the Fatherland. **Denis Sinyakov**

Christopher Columbus is on the move again in the New World, after numerous rejections in a nearly two-decade quest to find him a suitable spot.

Russian sculptor Zurab Tsereteli's towering statue of the explorer — twice the height of the Statue of Liberty without its pedestal and shunned by several U.S. cities — might be erected on Puerto Rico's northern coast. It would be the tallest structure in the U.S. Caribbean territory.

The chosen spot is near the coastal town of Arcibo, Jose Gonzalez, administrator of Holland Group Ports Investments, said Wednesday.

"It already was inspected by the artist and approved by him," Gonzalez said.

He declined to identify the specific location.

Although the site has been chosen, several permits must be approved before the project can go

forward, Gonzalez said, declining further comment.

It was unclear who picked the site and authorized the statue's move. Gonzalez's company runs the port where the colossal statue is stored.

The nearly 90-meter bronze creation shows Columbus at the wheel of a tiny ship with three billowing sails behind him. It weighs 600 metric tons.

Tsereteli is a favored sculptor of Mayor Yury Luzhkov, and his gigantic works, including the Peter the Great statue, dot Moscow's cityscape, much to the annoyance of many residents. President Dmitry Medvedev on Monday awarded Tsereteli with an Order for Services to the Fatherland, First Class.

Tsereteli built Columbus in 1991 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Columbus' 1492 arrival in the Western Hemisphere.

It was given to Puerto Rico as a gift after New York, Miami, Baltimore and other cities refused to accept it, for reasons ranging from cost to appearance. The Baltimore Sun called it "From Russia with Ugh."

After arriving in Puerto Rico, the statue drew more criticism. Some people said the arms are too long, the head too small and the one-handed greeting pose silly.

The original plan was to erect the statue in Catano, a seaside suburb of San Juan. But residents protested because the plan called for demolishing several dozen homes to make room for it, and problems arose with airplane flight paths.

The statue was then proposed for Mayaguez, but an appropriate location was never found. It has been in storage there for two years, said Gonzalez, whose company runs the Mayaguez port.

Puerto Rico's government has estimated that it would cost more than \$20 million to assemble the statue's 2,750 pieces.

(AP, MT)

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