

Russian Academic Resigns After 'Patriotic' Comment on Nemtsov Murder

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A deputy dean at one of Russia's top academic institutes has resigned following widespread outcry over his remarks on the killing of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov.

Vladimir Talismanov has voluntarily stepped down as deputy dean of molecular and chemical physics at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology — known as MIPT or Phystech — saying he regretted the "unpleasant incident" and was willing to step down if that helped preserve the reputation of his "wonderful and beloved institute," Kommersant newspaper reported Tuesday.

Talismanov, whose resignation followed an open letter signed by about two dozen of the institute's students and alumni denouncing his remarks and a public apology from his employer for his actions, said he "was not seeking fame or attention" when he posted a comment on his little-visited social network page, according to the report.

In the post on VKontakte social network in the aftermath of the brutal gunning down of Nemtsov, Talismanov wrote: "Americans created this scum, financed it, and then took it out themselves. Such is the fate of all prostitutes. [Now] there is one less scumbag."

The comment has since been deleted, after being widely quoted in media reports and repeated in the students' open letter.

The institute has accepted Talismanov's resignation, Russian media reports said. College president Nikolai Kudryavtsev said Talismanov would not be reinstated as deputy dean, but added he might continue at the institute as an instructor, Kommersant reported.

Patriotic Fervor

Many critics in Russia and abroad have blamed Nemtsov's death on a climate of intolerance created by months of angry statements from officials and state-run media denouncing opposition leaders as "traitors" and the "fifth column."

In an interview with Ekho Moskvyy radio Monday night, Talismanov denied expressing any joy at the politician's death, and said that his "ill considered" remark was prompted by his support for the rise of "patriotic" sentiment in the country.

Talismanov told Ekho Moskvyy he welcomed the change in sentiment from Russia's embrace of Western ideas in the 1990s and its criticism of its Soviet past.

"Now patriotic forces have been given an opportunity to speak about the Motherland, the need to love it," he said.

"Well, that lifted my spirits. But the remark [about Nemtsov] was certainly phrased badly," he added.

'A Tragedy'

In their open letter, MIPT students and alumni said they respected Talismanov's "right to express his opinions, even if his sense of tact does not keep him from expressing his opinion private at a moment like this."

"But we believe that any death should be viewed only as a tragedy, and in no other way," the letter said, also offering apologies to Nemtsov's son Anton, a student at the institute, on behalf of "those who were incapable of acting decently."

Not all students have sided with Talismanov. A woman who identified herself as Elizaveta and student at the institute, told Moscow's Govorit Moskva radio she thought a "dismissal over such a triviality is wrong."

"I can't support [Talismanov's] action, it was indecorous, but I can definitely say that the fact that this person won't work at MIPT — that's absolutely wrong," she was quoted as saying, adding that Talismanov was an "excellent" instructor and deputy dean.

Talismanov told Ekho Moskvyy he was not aware that Nemtsov's son was an MIPT student when he posted his comment. He offered his condolences to Anton Nemtsov during

an interview with Kommersant, saying he had "no desire to ridicule [Boris Nemtsov's] relatives."

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