

# Russian Official Denies Boycotting Pskov Festival Over Kashin Allegations

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Supporters of Oleg Kashin at a picket. The banner reads, 'Who beat up Oleg Kashin?'

The head of Russia's state agency for media development has denied a statement put out by his own spokespeople saying he was boycotting a festival in the Pskov region amid accusations linking the region's governor to a vicious attack on prominent journalist Oleg Kashin.

Rospechat chief Mikhail Seslavinsky said in a statement Thursday that he would not be attending the festival honoring famed author Sergei Dovlatov because he would be on vacation and not because of any allegations concerning Pskov Governor Andrei Turchak.

"Looking at the statement published by the Rospechat press service, I would like to say that my colleagues have expressed themselves poorly and incorrectly phrased my position. The Dovlatov festival will be attended by the acting head of the agency Vladimir Grigoryev, since I am currently on vacation," Seslavinsky said in a statement published Thursday on

Rospechat's website.

An earlier statement had suggested Seslavinsky would not be attending the event because it could be seen as a sign of support for the Pskov governor.

“I feel terribly guilty toward the organizers of the festival and those guests who had wanted to attend my talk [about Dovlatov],” read the earlier statement, also published on the agency's website on Thursday.

“But being employed in an official position and being closely connected to media affairs, I am afraid that my visit would be misinterpreted, and I don't want it to be seen as moral support for the leadership of the Pskov administration,” Seslavinsky was cited as saying in that statement.

Government agency Rospechat — not to be confused with a media distribution company of the same name — added in its statement that Seslavinsky had declined to attend the festival amid the “background of suspicions linking Pskov Region Governor Andrei Turchak to the attack on journalist Oleg Kashin.”

In declining to attend the festivities titled “Dovlatovfest,” held by the Pskov regional administration to celebrate the legacy of one of Russia's best-loved authors, Seslavinsky would have joined poets Sergei Gandlevsky and Alexei Tsvetkov, and the editorial staff of Russky Pioner (Russian Pioneer) magazine, who turned down their invitations, independent Ekho Moskvyy radio reported.

Kashin said in a statement on his blog earlier this month that two of the suspects in the near-fatal attack against him five years ago had said the hit was ordered by the head of the Leninet holding company, which is owned by relatives of the Pskov governor.

The journalist had criticized Turchak in his blog two months before the beating, and then dismissed the governor's demands for an apology. Kashin named four alleged attackers in his statement, but did not accuse Turchak directly.

The reports linking the governor to the beating prompted activists to hold one-person rallies in Moscow, demanding the Investigative Committee question Turchak in connection with the attack.

“Dovlatovfest” is scheduled to run Thursday through Saturday in the Pskov region, where the author stayed in the 1970s, supplementing his income by working as a museum tour guide. This period of his life is reflected in his novel “Zapovednik” (“Conservation Area”), known in an English-language translation as “Pushkin Hills.”

Last year, the Pskov region opened a museum commemorating Dovlatov in a village house in which he lived.

Dovlatov emigrated from the Soviet Union in the late 1970s to escape government persecution and settled in New York. He died in 1990.

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