

Jokes about Putin's Vladimir Statue Circulate, But It is No Laughing Matter Culture

Posted by:

Posted on : 2016/11/10 0:53:03

[Sergey] Gromenko says, "the opening of a monument to Prince Vladimir is not the best signal for Ukraine" because it is another indication that Moscow will continue to try to seize and/or distort historical events beyond the borders of the Russian Federation to justify what it wants to do now and in the future.

By Paul Goble* for "Window on Eurasia": Nov 7 – Two delightful jokes are now circulating in Moscow and the former Soviet space about the statue of Prince Vladimir that Vladimir Putin and other officials have dedicated, but both Ukrainian and Russian commentators say that the statue is anything but a laughing matter. The two jokes which are circulating widely on the Internet run as follows: The first has it: "Have you seen the statue of Vladimir in front of the Kremlin?" One asks. "Finally," his friend responds. "He really deserves it." "Not that Vladimir," the first says. "Vladimir of Kyiv!" "Wait a minute! Have we already surrendered?" The second runs: "Now there are three Vladimir's near the Kremlin wall: One (Lenin) is lying down. A second (Putin) is sitting. And a third (Prince Vladimir) is standing." Sergey Gromenko, a specialist at the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, says that the erection of the statue of Prince Vladimir in Moscow is "one element in the propagandistic war of the Kremlin against Ukraine" (apostrophe.ua/article/society/culture/2016-11-07/pamyatnik-kievskomu-knyazyu-v-moskve-ka-kaya-zdes-ugroza-ukraine/8179). Even though Prince Vladimir was a ruler of Kyivan Rus, Putin called him "the spiritual founder of the Russian state" and described his role as that of "gatherer and defender of the Russian lands." Moreover, the current Kremlin leader said that the prince's approach was entirely appropriate for rulers now. Thus, Gromenko says, "the opening of a monument to Prince Vladimir is not the best signal for Ukraine" because it is another indication that Moscow will continue to try to seize and/or distort historical events beyond the borders of the Russian Federation to justify what it wants to do now and in the future. Given Russia's punishments for those who "slander" the official version of Russian history, the Ukrainian says, it is clear that "Russia will consistently try to change its history to the better" regardless of the historical record. "And this won't make things easier for Ukraine because in the canonical version of Russian history, there are no Ukrainians and cannot be." As much of a threat as the erection of the statue of Prince Vladimir in Moscow may be for Ukraine, dissident Orthodox churchman Deacon Andrey Kurayev says that the speeches Putin and Patriarch Kirill gave at the ceremony portend disasters for Russia and its relations with the world (diak-kuraev.livejournal.com/1391477.html?utm_source=fbsharing&utm_medium=social).

Both speakers accept the version of Prince Vladimir presented in the chronicles. Putin in particular celebrated the role of the prince in fighting other Russian states which involved the massive shedding of blood to build the centralized Russian state. And the current Kremlin leader invoked the prince to support his ideas of "a clearly utilitarian system of

values,” to which: “Your morality must be a means for the strengthening of our power.” The Orthodox patriarch’s remarks were “must more interesting,” Kurayev says. They contain two dangerous theses: “pluralism and the relativeness of opinions must not be tolerated” and “religion must not be only the personal conviction of a ruler but must be imposed by him on his subordinates.” Such bold declarations, the deacon says, represent a dramatic departure from all the assertions Russian officials and Russian churchmen have made for 25 years. And they bode ill for Russia’s future: all those empires that have tried to maintain this approach have made enemies of everyone in the name of “’popular unity’” and they have disappeared as a result.

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The commentary above is from Paul Goble’s “Window on Eurasia” series and appears here with the author’s permission. Contact Goble at: paul.goble@gmail.com Submit commentary for publication in UBO on any subject related to Ukraine to: editor@ukrainebusiness.com.ua Photo courtesy Pravda.ru