On Unity Day, Nationalists Hold Largest Rally in Years

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Nationalists marking National Unity Day with a march in southeast Moscow. **Pavel Golovkin**

At least 5,000 nationalists have rallied for curbs on immigration in one of the largest such demonstrations in years in Moscow.

Activists shouted "Russia for Russians" and carried banners calling for "White Power" and "Orthodox Faith or Death" in a march from the Lyublino to the Marino metro station on the capital's southeast outskirts to commemorate the National Unity Day holiday on Thursday.

"The immigrants spit in our faces. I'm fed up with all this," said Anatoly Krovtov, a 65-year-old pensioner. Some teenaged skinheads made Nazi salutes and shouted "Glory to Russia."

March organizers and anti-racist groups said the march was the largest in the capital in at least five years. Police said there were no reports of violence. City Hall authorized the rally.

The number of participants at the annual Russian March was up by one-third from last year mainly because of a performance by Kolovrat, a rock group popular among nationalists, said

Galina Kozhevnikova, whose anti-racist Sova center monitored the march.

Sova says the level of xenophobia in Russia is high but stable.

The number of racist murders in Moscow has fallen in recent years amid a police crackdown initiated after nationalists grew more critical of the government, Kozhevnikova said. A significant minority of the protesters at Thursday's march chanted anti-Kremlin slogans.

National Unity Day was introduced in 2005 to celebrate the defeat of Polish invaders in 1612 and replace a Communist celebration of the 1917 Revolution.

At least 10,000 activists of the Pro-Kremlin youth group Nashi held a rival rally in central Moscow, also dubbed Russian March, in which a mainly teenage crowd chanted pro-Kremlin slogans. (Reuters, MT)

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