

2,000 Detained to Prevent Violence

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Interior Ministry troops getting ready to patrol central Moscow on Saturday. But first, their commander told them to pull their pant legs over their valenki. **Vladimir Filonov**

As the unprecedented nationalist protests continued over the weekend, police again resorted to mass detentions to prevent violent clashes between Slavs and ethnic minorities.

About 2,000 people — including many schoolchildren — were detained on Saturday in Moscow and the surrounding region alone, news reports said.

City police detained 1,192 people in the capital between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. Saturday, an unidentified police official told Interfax on Sunday.

In the surrounding Moscow region, another 800 people were detained to prevent them from carrying out unsanctioned protests, regional police spokesman Yevgeny Gildeyev told national news agencies.

Officers confiscated numerous weapons from the detainees, including two handguns, 13

nonlethal guns, 21 knives, and pyrotechnic devices, the reports said.

City police on Sunday did not confirm the detention figures, which would rank among the biggest in years. A spokesman, Arkady Bashirov, merely referred to official statements late Saturday that said "hundreds" had been detained, adding that exact numbers were hard to tell.

Bashirov said the situation in the capital was calm Sunday as police presence was stepped up and riot police continued to guard sensitive places, including train stations.

While most of Saturday's detentions took place around the city's Ploshchad Yevropa and Manezh Square, where racist rioting erupted a week earlier on Dec. 11, the single biggest protest went ahead largely unhindered near the Ostankino television center before being disbanded by police.

The leaders of the National Democratic Alliance, a newly formed nationalist movement, first held a small police-sanctioned picket outside the center to protest what they called biased media reports.

Ostankino houses Channel One, the country's main state television channel.

The small rally grew to a crowd of about 500 when the activists moved into a nearby park, where they were unexpectedly joined by scores of youths and schoolchildren shouting radical nationalist slogans, news reports said.

The protesters, many of whom wore medical masks, shouted slogans complaining that the rights of ethnic Russians were being infringed in the country.

The police did not follow the protesters from Ostankino, thus allowing the rally to escalate, a Radio Liberty [report](#) said.

But city police spokesman Viktor Biryukov told Interfax that practically all participants of the protest were later detained.

Among them were many schoolchildren, "girls and boys from Grades 8, 9 and 10. They were handed over to their parents or legal guardians at the police station," he said.

Observers have been bewildered by the fact that the wave of nationalist protests, which broke out after a Spartak football fan was killed during a Dec. 5 brawl with North Caucasus natives, has been carried by students.

Smaller incidents were reported from cities throughout the country. In Tula, about 30 football fans held a peaceful gathering Saturday in memory of the killed football fan, Yegor Sviridov. The protesters offered no resistance when police disbanded them, a police spokesman told Interfax.

Protests were also held in Volgograd and St. Petersburg, the New Times magazine reported on its web site, quoting local bloggers.

The protests have been sponsored by some well-known ultranationalist groups like Russky

Obraz, which helped gather some of the 5,500 people who descended on Manezh Square just outside the Kremlin on Dec. 11.

Analysts said Sunday that it was too early to say whether the protests posed a serious danger for the government.

Vladimir Pribylovsky, head of the Panorama think tank, said the National Democratic Alliance might carry a risk because unlike Russky Obraz and other fascist movements, its leaders were completely independent from Kremlin influence.

"These people can whip up xenophobia where the Kremlin doesn't want it," he said.

But in an indication that the new movement is a serious worry for the authorities, the National Democratic Alliance's web site, Nazdem.info, was unavailable Sunday, and its leaders said on their LiveJournal [blog](#) that it was targeted by massive denial-of-service hacker attacks.

Formed on Dec. 13, the National Democratic Alliance counts as its leaders a former neo-Nazi and a one-time Orthodox fundamentalist.

At the protest outside Ostankino, Ilya Lazarenko, one of the movement's leaders, read out a statement titled "Down With the Empire of Lies" in which he accused the government of censoring media and not allowing objective coverage of the nationalist protests.

The statement, posted on the movement's LiveJournal blog, also demands a public discussion "about the status of ethnic republics in the North Caucasus."

Pressed by a Radio Liberty reporter, Lazarenko explained that his movement wants the Russian Federation to be an ethnically homogenous Russian state and the non-ethnic Russian territories to be allowed to become independent.

He also said his movement backed a change of power, but that it could not name any new leaders.

Lazarenko is a well-known figure in the country's nationalist scene. He became notorious in the 1990s when he set up neo-Nazi and pagan movements, including the bizarre Church of Nav, an occult brotherhood inaugurated on Hitler's birthday, April 20, 1996.

In 1998, his National Front party staged a rally at the U.S. Embassy under the slogan "Freedom for Texas!"

Recently, he has become more moderate, Pribylovsky said, pointing out that the alliance's program includes support for a liberal market economy.

He said Alexei Shiropayev, another leader of the movement, is "a very talented poet" and former Orthodox fundamentalist.

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