

Egypt's Troubles Galvanize Protesters

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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Hundreds of activists listening to liberal opposition leaders speak Monday evening on Triumfalnaya Ploshchad. **Igor Tabakov**

Galvanized by popular uprisings against authoritarian leaders in Tunisia and Egypt, hundreds of liberal opposition activists chanted for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's ouster at a sanctioned Triumfalnaya Ploshchad rally that ended peacefully Monday evening.

But police, who have broken up similar rallies over the past year, did detain opposition leader Eduard Limonov and about two dozen of his supporters as they headed to the square to stage an unauthorized rally of their own, RIA-Novosti [reported](#). Many of the activists with The Other Russia group, which split from the liberal opposition late last year, were detained as they exited the metro near the square.

At least six of the detainees were beaten by police, but inside police vans, not in the streets like during previous crackdowns, Gazeta.ru [said](#).

Organizers of the sanctioned rally — scheduled for the 31st day of every month with 31 days to

commemorate Article 31 of the Constitution granting the right of assembly — said 2,500 activists came to the downtown square. Police put the figure at 500.

Opposition leader Boris Nemtsov won loud applause by comparing the political situation in Russia to that in Egypt, a country undergoing uprising along with neighboring Tunisia after decades of authoritarian rule. He compared Putin to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, now losing grip of power after 30 years at the helm.

“Putin: Resign, we're sick and tired of you,” Nemtsov chanted along with the crowd.

Both Nemtsov and Limonov served 15 days in prison in connection with a sanctioned rally on Triumfalnaya Ploshchad on Dec. 31.

Human rights champion Lyudmila Alexeyeva attempted to mend fences with Limonov in her own speech at the rally.

“The fact that we obtained permission to hold this rally is our common victory. It belongs to everyone who came here in the past,” she said in a clear reference to Limonov, although she did not identify him by name.

Among the other speakers were liberal politician Vladimir Ryzhkov, razor-tongued radio host Viktor Shenderovich and environmental activist Yevgenia Chirikova.

Participants of Monday's rally had to pass through metal detectors installed on the square to attend the gathering.

Liberal rallies also took place Monday in other locations nationwide, with several protesters detained in St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad, two cities that refused to authorize the event. Some 80 people gathered in Yekaterinburg for a sanctioned rally, Interfax said.

The easing of Moscow City Hall's policy toward the liberal opposition is seen by some as a sign that the authorities are more worried about nationalist violence than liberals. Violence erupted on another downtown square, Manezh, after some 5,500 nationalists staged an unsanctioned rally in December to protest the death of a football fan at the hands of North Caucasus natives.

Liberals and leftists are generally at odds with nationalists in Russia, but officials claimed a link between them Monday as they detained a Limonov follower suspected of participating in the Manezh Square rioting.

Igor Berezyuk, a Belarussian citizen, was held in Moscow along with 10 more Other Russia members, the Investigative Committee said.

The rest were released, but Berezyuk remains in detention because investigators have a video of him punching a riot police officer on Manezh Square, the Investigative Committee [said](#) on its web site.

Other Russia spokesman Alexander Averin dismissed the accusations in a telephone interview Monday.

“Not one of them was there,” he said of Other Russia members participating in the Manezh rioting.

But the rioting “means the police can take any person in for questioning now,” he said.

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