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Archived Live Blog: Rallies in Moscow

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Four demonstrations are planned in Moscow on Saturday: an opposition march and rally ending at Bolotnaya Ploshchad; a pro-Putin rally at Poklonnaya Gora; a rally organized by liberal activists at Prospect Sakharova; and an event hosted by the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party at Pushkin Square. You can read more about plans for the events in our article from Friday.

Here we will be posting updates from Moscow Times reporters attending the events, as well as news and links to photos and videos from bloggers and news sites. We will also be posting updates and links on our Twitter page.

2:44 p.m.: People are steadily flowing out of Bolotnaya Ploshchad—the opposition rally is wrapping up. We will have an article with all the news from today's demonstrations up on the website in a few hours.

2:37 p.m.: Environmental activist Yevgeniya Chirikova took the stage at the opposition rally minutes ago and called on demonstrators to sign a petition to register liberal leader Grigory

Yavlinsky as a presidential candidate, RIA-Novosti reported. His bid to run was nixed by the Central Elections Commission last month after they threw out many of the signatures he submitted in support of his candidacy.

Yavlinsky also took the stage and said he would make every effort to eliminate censorship in Russia's media.

2:22 p.m.: Moscow Times' Chloe Cranston with some great reporting from the pro-Putin rally:

"Many people have begun leaving the rally, and many young people here are very drunk. When asked why they were here, some older people said they came to support Putin, that Putin is wonderful. But many younger demonstrators resisted telling us why they came. Two people said they did not come by choice but were coerced by their companies.

"There is a massive group of people in red jackets handing out leaflets that say 'USSR 2.0.' Their leaflets advertize a rally to be held Feb. 23 that is 'anti-Kremlin' and 'anti-Orange.'"

2:11 p.m.: Kommersant is reporting that the pro-Putin rally at Poklonnaya Gora is coming to an end. (They also noted the behavior of some old women there, who are apparently dancing to the sounds of a band called Play Accordian.) Widely different numbers of demonstrators were reported as being in attendance at the rally by police and journalists, ranging from 15,000 to 90,000.

2:07 p.m.: Vedomosti is reporting that a group of nationalists at Kaluzhskaya Ploshchad, the start point of the opposition march, has just been detained after they prepared to undertake "provocations."

2:02 p.m.: Moscow Times intern Chloe Cranston, reporting from the pro-Putin rally:

"The speeches are mainly directed against foreigners, particularly against Americans. The main slogan of the speeches is 'Slava Rossii'—'Glory to Russia.'"

Chloe added that a group of old women is taking gulps of whiskey, apparently to keep warm!

1:56 p.m.: Ridus News is reporting that the flow of people from the opposition march to Bolotnaya Ploshchad has lessened and that the main part of demonstrators has arrived at the square. People waving tri-color imperial Russia flags—white, black, and yellow, the symbol of the nationalist movement—arrived to the square minutes ago and set off flares.

The group of paratroopers is currently performing on the stage at Bolotnaya, with their anti-Putin song (see video below). Ridus has a live feed up of the stage at the opposition rally.

1:47 p.m.: It is still very cold on Moscow streets, minus 19 C, as tens of thousands rally at competing demonstrations. Moscow Times reporter Justin Varilek says he spotted a man with ice in his beard in the opposition march; reporter Jonathan Earle has holed up in a grocery store along the march route attempting to warm up; and here at Starlite Diner at Bolotnaya Ploshchad, site of the opposition rally, demonstrators have poured in, stripping off many layers of sweaters and coats before sitting down to coffee and French fries.

1:39 p.m.: Moscow Times intern Chloe Cranston, reporting from the pro-Putin rally:

"Other journalists here estimate the crowd at 15,000-20,000 people. There are lots of anti-West signs—one says 'West, get your hands off Russia.' There are contingents of Cossacks, lots of people in fatigues. The crowd is mostly men over 40 years old. The Park Pobedy metro station [nearest the rally] is closed—no one is being allowed in."

1:32 p.m.: Vedomosti reports that the first speaker at the pro-Putin rally, political analyst Sergei Kurginyan, already addressed the crowd. The newspaper said the crowd reaction was "inert."

1:28 p.m.: Quick update on the number of demonstrators: Moscow police reported that at 1 p.m., there were between 87,000 and 90,000 people at the pro-Putin event and around 23,000 at the opposition march. Other independent reports, including from Vedomosti, have put the number at the opposition event as high as 50,000.

1:18 p.m.: Moscow police said at 12:40 p.m. that there are around 56,000 people at the pro-Putin rally at Poklonnaya Gora and just over 14,000 at the opposition march on Bolshaya Yakimanka, Interfax reported. Meanwhile, Novaya Gazeta has counted around 40,000 people at the opposition march and says more are waiting to go through the metal detectors arrayed at the entrance to the march street.

Still more, different reports of numbers: Vedomosti says sociologists have posted themselves at the metal detectors at the opposition march and have counted 50,000 people. And Moscow police said the Liberal Democratic Party rally was attended by 1,000 people.

1:04 p.m.: Demonstrators have begun arriving to Bolotnaya Ploshchad, where an opposition rally is scheduled to begin at 2 p.m. Interfax reported that protesters began marching earlier than scheduled toward Bolotnaya, which may explain why they have already begun to arrive. Will they stand around in the -20 weather for the next two hours?

1:01 p.m.: Interfax is reporting what chants are being shouted by demonstrators at the opposition march: "Russia without Putin," "We demand new elections," "Russia will be free," and others directed against Putin.

12:50 p.m.: Kommersant reporter Uliana Malashenko is at the pro-Putin rally and just tweeted: "The majority of demonstrators at Poklonnaya Gora can't answer the question of why they came. Almost all are from organizations. One person said [he came] for money."

There were widespread reports in recent days of companies, including state-owned Sberbank, and local government organs pressuring people to attend the "anti-orange" rally in support of the current authorities.

12:43 p.m.: TV channel RT is reporting a crowd estimate at the opposition march of around 7,000 people.

12:32 p.m.: Interfax is reporting that a group of Buddhists is among the opposition marchers. Their representative Olga Ivanovna said they attended in order to prevent violence. "We're against revolutions and interventions," she told Interfax.

12:24 p.m.: State-run English-language TV channel RT has a live feed of the opposition march up that's working rather well. So far, there have been images of rows of marchers passing with signs and multi-colored flags. One group just passed the camera with a long sign that reads, "Your presidential elections are a farce!"

11:47 a.m.: A reminder on what time today's events are scheduled to begin:

Opposition march along Bolshaya Yakimanka, ending with a rally at Bolotnaya Ploshchad: march starts at 1 p.m., rally at 2 p.m., over by 3 p.m. (map of the march route)

Pro-Putin rally at Poklonnaya Gora: starts at 12:30 p.m.

Liberal Democratic Party rally at Pushkin Square: 12 p.m.

Liberal splinter-group rally at Prospekt Akademika Sakharova: 2 p.m.

11:29 a.m.: Which presidential candidates will be attending the rallies: Billionaire tycoon Mikhail Prokhorov will be attending the "For Fair Elections" march along Bolshaya Yakimanka but does not plan to address the crowd. (But he seems enthusiastic about his participation in the march, even naming the event "March with Mikhail Prokhorov" on his LiveJournal page.) Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky will be addressing the crowd at the LDPR rally at Pushkin Square. There are no reports that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin will speak at the event in his support (though it would likely stir quite a response from the crowd if he showed up). Communist Party candidate Gennady Zyuganov and A Just Russia candidate Sergei Mironov will not be participating in any of the planned events, though Mironov said he remains in solidarity with those calling for fair elections.

11:08 a.m.: Opposition march speakers and performers: The organizing committee for the opposition rally at Bolotnaya Ploshchad published a partial list of who will be speaking and performing. There will be six speakers, including author Lyudmila Ulitskaya and journalist Leonid Parfyonov, as well as three musical performances. The performers will be rocker Yury Shevchuk, leader of the band DDT; music critic, and vocal Kremlin critic, Artemy Troitsky; and a group of paratroopers whose anti-Putin ballad has gone viral on the RuNet, collecting over 1 million views since it was posted Jan. 26. Watch a video of the group performing the song below, or on YouTube, where there is a decent translation of the lyrics into English. They say, addressing Putin, "You're a typical bureaucrat—not a tsar or God," and lambast Putin for his joke last year about protesters' white ribbons looking like condoms.

10:54 a.m.: Police received a tip early this morning about a suspicious box with wires and an alarm clock on it at Pushkin Square, site of a rally by the Liberal Democratic Party scheduled to start at noon. A bomb squad investigated, and the device turned out to be a fake, RIA-Novosti reported.

There is heavy security all over Moscow today in preparation for the four planned rallies.

10:45 a.m.: One thing we'll be looking out for is reports of so-called "provocateurs" in attendance at the opposition march and rally. An employee from an electric company wrote on her Facebook page earlier this week that she and her colleagues had been told by company management that they had to attend the march on Bolshaya Yakimanka, which is sponsored

by a coalition of opposition groups, but hold signs and chant slogans supporting Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. The company, Inter RAO, denied the accusation in an interview with radio station Kommersant-FM on Friday.

10:28 a.m.: Putin comments on the rally in his support: Prime Minister Vladimir Putin responded Friday to reports that some government officials have been coercing their subordinates into attending Saturday's rally in his support. Putin told news agency Interfax that "there is nothing good" about such tactics but suggested the reports might be exaggerated.

The prime minister was responding to reports of companies and local authorities pressuring their employees and subordinates to participate in the so-called "anti-orange" demonstration Saturday at Poklonnaya Gora.

Putin said he shares the views of those in the "anti-orange" movement—named after Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution, which saw thousands of demonstrators occupy a central square in Kiev to protest allegedly false election results.

Speaking about his supporters who were planning to attend the event at Poklonnaya Gora, Putin said, "Generally such large events in support of the authorities differ somewhat from other such demonstrations: the people who attend feel a threat to certain interests they have, a danger of losing something—that is precisely why they attend, to announce their position."

Putin seems to be re-iterating his oft-repeated stance that his remaining in power will maintain stability for Russia, during what he has called a delicate moment for the country.

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