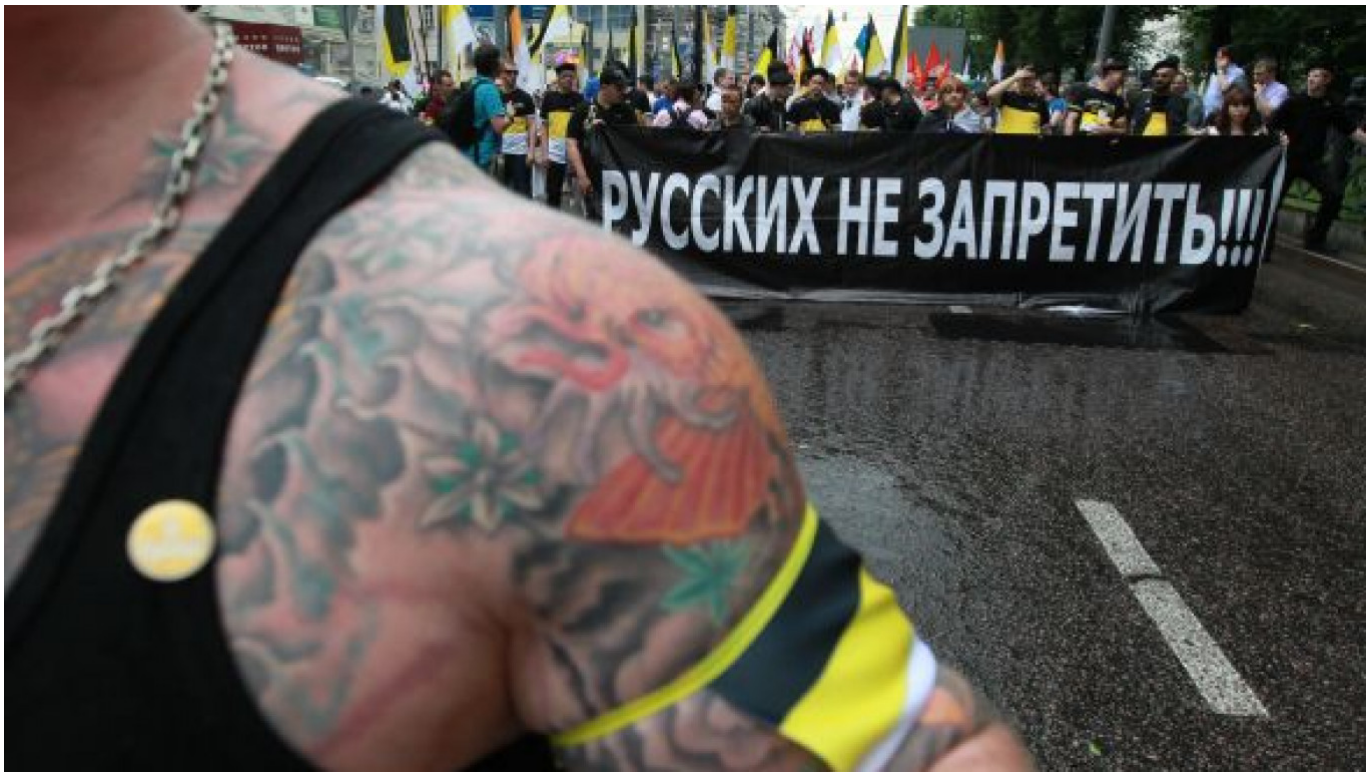
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Ultranationalists on the Rise

By Alexander Bratersky

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Nationalists bearing the yellow-and-black imperial Russian flag as they march at the June 12 opposition rally. **Dmitry Abramov**

Correction appended

As the opposition movement gains strength, the ultranationalist groups that have joined its ranks are drawing more attention from the public — as well as the Kremlin.

Many observers of the June 12 opposition rally noted a large presence of nationalist groups — from ones carrying the yellow-and-black imperial flag, the banner of the nationalist movement, to more marginal groups like Great Russia, which sported black Nazi-style uniforms with armbands and garrison caps.

A Great Russia spokesman said after the rally that the group would continue to wear their Nazi-style uniforms, much to the dismay of moderate nationalist leaders who have distanced themselves from the fringe element.

When Ivan Mironov, 31, deputy chairman of the nationalist All-Russian People's Union, took to the stage during the rally, his emotional speech about the ruling regime's imminent demise was met with resounding applause.

But speaking from the same stage a short while later, liberal-leaning former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov was booed over similar comments.

Vladimir Sungorkin, editor of the Kremlin-allied Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper, cited the sharp contrast to rouse liberals to rally behind President Vladimir Putin.

"If the regime would fall, it's not Kasyanov who'd win, but guys like Ivan Mironov," Sungorkin said in a recent interview with the liberal Dozhd television station.

A historian by background, Mironov spent three years in pretrial detention for the attempted murder of Anatoly Chubais, the architect of Russian privatization, in 2005. He was found not guilty.

Mironov's father, Boris Mironov, was a press minister under President Boris Yeltsin. He was fired for anti-Semitic remarks.

"Not every enemy of Putin is your friend," liberal politician Leonid Gozman said by phone, referring to ultranationalists at the June 12 rally. "Fascists in power are much worse than Putin."

The Kremlin genuinely fears the rise of ultranationalist groups, which have the potential to sow mass disharmony throughout a nation already divided about the staying power of the ruling regime.

Though in the past the Kremlin has used ultranationalists to its advantage in election years, like when it hurriedly formed the Rodina party in 2003, it has been careful to prevent them from gaining too much power.

Keeping Close Watch

Alexander Verkhovsky, an analyst at the Sova think tank, which studies nationalist movements, said the government started to monitor radical nationalist groups more closely in 2006, when a dispute in the Karelian city of Kondopoga escalated into widespread ethnic violence.

That dispute, between locals and businessmen from the Northern Caucasus, was exploited by ultranationalist leaders to push an anti-migrant agenda.

"After Kondopoga, authorities understood that the challenges coming from those groups might be on a bigger scale," Verkhovsky said.

Since that time, law enforcement officials have disbanded several ultranationalist groups, including the notorious National Socialist Society, members of which were given lengthy prison sentences in 2011 for two dozen killings of non-Slavs.

Verkhovsky said that while he sees danger in groups like the National Socialist Society, he sees

no potential for ultranationalist movements to besiege the nation's political arena.

"Maybe the next regime will be more nationalistic, but it won't be formed by the current leaders of the far right," Verkhovsky said. "It will be people among the establishment."

An Unlikely Union

With nationalist sentiments on the rise, the right and the left are forming an unlikely alliance against Putin's regime.

The only nationalist party currently represented in parliament is Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party, which has re-emerged from a fervently neo-fascist party to a more moderate political force and an ally to the ruling United Russia.

Another salient figure in the nationalist movement, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, has called for nationalists to support the Kremlin and not the political opposition.

Conversely, prominent opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who calls himself a "national democrat," has wooed the nationalist element to unite against Putin.

Speaking at "Russian march" rallies attended by thousands of nationalists, he has delivered his message to the nationalist movement's full spectrum.

Navalny coined the now-famous slogan, "Stop Feeding the Caucasus," urging the government to cease donations to the Northern Caucasus republics, whose population is seen as hostile by many ethnic Slavs.

Support for ceasing the donations is shared by some liberal-leaning figures, including economist Vladislav Inozemtsev, who see the poor Caucasus republics as a hindrance to national development.

The imprisoned former Yukos CEO, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a central figure in the opposition, blessed the alliance with moderate nationalists who do not promote racial hatred.

In a recent article in the Novaya Gazeta newspaper, he said "real nationalism should be liberal."

User-Friendly Nationalism

But while liberal-leaning politicians are often cautious to speak about their nationalist allies, those in the nationalist camp do not hide their agenda. Many of them believe that their slogans are more attractive to the public than those of the Western-minded liberals.

"We have to be ready, then the boat will begin to rock," Alexander Belov, a leader of the banned radical Movement Against Illegal Immigration, said last week at a nationalist strategy meeting.

The meeting, which took place in the Slavic Cultural Center in downtown Moscow, was attended by dozens of nationalists from all walks of life. The venue included a former investment banker, an acclaimed fiction author and even Boris Mironov, the ousted Yeltsin-

era press minister.

"We have to create new slogans because the existing ones are either threatening or do not carry any appealing message," said Konstantin Krylov, a nationalist philosopher and author of several novels.

He was echoed by fellow nationalist leader Georgy Borovikov, who said slogans like "Russia for Russians" should be mixed with ones against the World Trade Organization and in support of the flagging social sector to target not only low-income citizens but also members of the middle class.

Pavel Salin, an expert with the Center for Current Politics, said the current Kremlin feels "more comfortable" with the presence of marginal ultranationalist groups to scare away the public than with the emerging modern nationalists who do not oppose democratic principles.

"Authorities are afraid of Western-style nationalism," said Salin, who named Navalny and Valery Solovei, a professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations and an ideologist of moderate nationalism, which distances itself from the ultranationalist agenda.

"The Kremlin perfectly understands that the liberal ideology in its purest form is obsolete and the only ideology that can be toyed with is the nationalist one," Salin said.

Radicals

The lack of popular charismatic leaders and a strong political agenda does not enable a large ultranationalist party to emerge, Verkhovsky said.

"It is not only that the Kremlin is disturbing them. Those who are on the front line are less marginal than the rest," he said.

While some nationalist leaders are trying to present themselves as soft-spoken businesslike people who advocate democratic values and legal means to regulate migration, many of them are less appealing.

Dmitry Dyomushkin, a vocal member of the united nationalist movement, has recently demanded that nationalists be represented in the presidential human rights council.

Dyomushkin is a former head of the banned national socialist Slavic Union, whose emblem resembles a swastika. His website calls Adolf Hitler "an enemy but a teacher."

In the Russian media, radicals like Dyomushkin are usually described only as "nationalist" to avoid liability.

Vladimir Pribylovsky, an analyst with the Panorama think tank, said the union of "nationalists and democrats" is a controversial venture. "While they should not ostracize the moderate nationalist wing, there is a danger of forming a union with people like Dyomushkin."

Pribylovsky also said the authorities might use the presence of ultranationalist groups among

protesters to smear the opposition in front of the West.

A similar tactic was used by Boris Yeltsin's Kremlin against left-wing supporters of the Russian parliament during the political standoff of 1993.

During that time the defenders of the parliament included various anti-Yeltsin forces, including neo-Nazi groups led by Alexander Barkashov's Russian National Unity.

The presence of the armed fascist groups gave more leverage to the Kremlin to present Yeltsin's opponents in a negative light, pundits said at the time.

Correction: An earlier version of this article inaccurately described the outfits worn by members of nationalist group Great Russia at a June 12 protest as "Nazi uniforms," instead of "Nazi-style uniforms."

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