

United Russia Deputy Stomps on White Ribbon

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October 28, 2012



United Russia lawmaker Alexander Sidyakin waving a white ribbon — a symbol of the anti-Kremlin protest movement — during his speech to the State Duma on Friday. He called the white ribbon a “symbol of capitulation.”

State Duma deputies are distancing themselves from the anti-Kremlin opposition after a United Russia member publicly denounced as traitors those who wear the white ribbons to show solidarity with the anti-Kremlin opposition.

Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov called on members of his party to stop wearing the white ribbons Saturday, a day after the United Russia deputy disparaged him and several of his deputies by name in a Duma speech.

“Just Russia and white ribbons are not the same,” Mironov said on Vesti television after a party meeting.

Mironov, a former ally of President Vladimir Putin who lost his post as Federation Council speaker amid a falling-out last year, urged party members to distance themselves from opposition protesters, saying their large rallies have turned into a “political sect.”

He also threatened to expel party members Ilya Ponomaryov and Dmitry Gudkov, who have attended the rallies and worn white ribbons, for joining the opposition’s Coordination Council, a 45-member body elected in an online vote a week ago.

Ponomaryov and Gudkov were among the lawmakers whom Alexander Sidyakin of United Russia accused of being “traitors” by wearing the white ribbon, which he scathingly denounced Friday as “a symbol of capitulation,” “a revolutionary export,” “a symbol of betrayal” and “the ribbon of shame.”

Waving a white ribbon in one hand, Sidyakin railed against lawmakers who wore it and then dropped it to the floor and stomped on it.

“I will do to this ribbon the same thing that these people wanted to do to our country: I want to trample on it,” Sidyakin, who wore an enormous orange-and-black striped St. George’s ribbon on his own lapel, said in a speech posted on YouTube.

Sidyakin was a little-known deputy before he began his attacks on the opposition this year.

He co-wrote a bill toughening rally rules and spearheaded heavily criticized legislation requiring nongovernmental groups that receive funding from abroad and practice “political activity” to register as “foreign agents.”

Gudkov said Sidyakin’s behavior looked “idiotic.”

“I would like to ask Sidyakin, who loves vacationing in the U.S., to tell Americans how he trampled on a white ribbon when he goes there again,” Gudkov told Interfax.

Sidyakin has said on Twitter that he’s enjoyed vacationing in the U.S.

The white ribbon was first worn by participants in the anti-Kremlin rallies that began in December and has become a fashionable protest symbol, adorning many sympathizers’ backpacks and jackets. Some opposition supporters feature the symbol in their Facebook and Twitter profile photos.

During a television call-in show in December, Putin joked that he thought the white ribbons worn by protesters were condoms. He later said he hadn’t wanted to insult the demonstrators.

It is unclear how the white ribbon became a symbol of the anti-Kremlin camp. It had been used in the past by policeman-turned-opposition-activist Alexei Dymovsky, whose movement pushing for police reform was called White Ribbon.

Dymovsky gained national attention after recording a YouTube address to then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in 2009 in which he complained about problems in the police force.

In another sign of tensions between Duma deputies and the opposition, Communist leader

Gennady Zyuganov told his party congress Saturday that he had warned opposition leader Sergei Udaltsov against siding with “liberals” like Alexei Navalny and Ilya Yashin on the Coordination Council, Reuters reported.

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