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Police Detain Dozens of Pro-Dozhd Demonstrators (Video)

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Policemen leading a demonstrator to a nearby police van at an unsanctioned rally on Red Square on Saturday. **Alexander Zemlianichenko**

At least 41 people were detained on Manezh Square on Saturday for staging a flash mob in support of the imperiled independent television channel Dozhd.

The group of demonstrators carried open umbrellas in a show of solidarity with Dozhd, which translates as "rain."

All major cable operators recently dropped Dozhd, the country's only opposition-leaning television channel, in a move the channel's supporters see as a Kremlin-orchestrated campaign to crack down on independent media. Pro-Kremlin politicians lambasted the channel for publishing a poll last month asking whether it would have been better to surrender Leningrad during the Nazi siege of the city from 1941 to 1945 in order "to save hundreds of thousands of lives."

Police said detentions were made at Saturday's flash mob because it was an unauthorized rally. One police officer said that “more than two people cannot gather in public with umbrellas.” Another one told demonstrators: “You are trying to organize a Maidan here,” referring to Ukraine’s ongoing Euromaidan protest movement.

Moscow police said in a statement that it had dispersed "a group of people who attempted to hold a rally that was not duly coordinated with the authorities."

Police detaining protesters on Manezh Square.

"Despite multiple demands by police officers, those citizens failed to stop their illegal activities," a police spokesman said. "About 40 people were taken to police stations."

When several older women were detained, both protesters and passers-by became indignant.

Several demonstrators said that the effective ban on carrying umbrellas marked a new level of what they described as the “government’s absurdity.” Some mockingly asked whether the ban would also be applied to wearing hats.

One protester jokingly held a newspaper above his head as a makeshift umbrella and was promptly detained.

During the flash mob, French journalist Natalya Uvarova was injured after falling down and was rushed to a hospital. Doctors later said they suspected she had fractured her hip.

Several protesters and Dozhd reporter Yegor Maksimov said Uvarova had been “trampled” by police officers, but police denied these accusations. Police also came under fire from demonstrators for not coming to Uvarova's aid. She was on the ground for about 15 minutes.

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