

New Russian Summer Camps to Deter Kids From Becoming Protesters

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Russia is opening several new summer camps this year to teach children to love their motherland before they grow up into political protesters.

Children will be instructed by elite-troop veterans who served in Chechnya and Afghanistan, as well as retired military commanders and athletes at the summer camps, the first of which — titled "I am a citizen and defender of a great country" — will open Friday in the Nizhny Novgorod region, the Izvestia newspaper reported.

"If children's upbringing is allowed to run its course, we [Russia] will get a 'Maidan,'" Denis Sadovnikov, an official in charge of the project from the Russian Military Historical Society, was quoted as saying. Kiev's Maidan Square was the focal point of a protest movement that deposed Ukraine's Moscow-backed president earlier this year.

The new camps are part of a government program to create a youth scout movement with

a "military patriotic" slant that was proposed by Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky, who chairs the Military Historical Society, Izvestia reported.

As an alternative to a Russian Maidan, children can find a "positive" role model in Igor Strelkov, a Russian militant who leads pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine, Sadovnikov said.

More than 1,500 children aged 12 to 18 will attend the "patriotic" camps this summer, the report said.

"Now is high time to begin instilling in children a love for the motherland," Sadovnikov was quoted as saying.

The camps will practice military-style discipline, hold "patriotic" lectures and instruct children in military tactics and firearms, as well as radiological, chemical and biological defense, the report said.

The boys and girls will also engage in parachute jumping and paintball battles, and will sleep in tents, the report said.

But officials in charge of the scout movement insisted that the project was pacifistic and focused on civilian issues such as learning first-aid skills, water rescue and wilderness survival, Izvestia reported.

"The main goal of scouting is helping people, not learning how to kill them," said Irina Strelkova, the head of Moscow scout group named "A Pack of Wolfings."

Another scout group leader Sergei Mogilyov said the movement has "nothing to do with politics" and was not affiliated with any political party, Izvestia reported.

"Let the culture minister do whatever he thinks necessary. This will not affect our life in any way," he was quoted as saying.

A history teacher at a Moscow school and board member of a history teachers' association, Tamara Edelman, said that drilling children in military skills and preparing them for battle was dangerous for children's emotional well-being.

"Children should not march on parade grounds or learn how to assemble a Kalashnikov automatic rifle. Let professional soldiers do that," she was quoted as saying.

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