

Russian Celebs, Senator to Launch 'Anti-Maidan' Movement

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A Russian senator has teamed up with a motley crew of celebrities to establish the Anti-Maidan, a movement that will aim at forestalling popular uprisings in the country, state news agency TASS reported Thursday.

"All street movements, all 'color revolutions' lead to bloodshed, and children, women and the elderly are those who primarily suffer," Dmitry Sablin, a member of the Federation Council and deputy head of a war veterans organization, said in comments carried by TASS. "We have come together so this does not happen."

In November 2013, demonstrators gathered on central Kiev's Independence Square — commonly called the Maidan — to protest then-President Viktor Yanukovich's reluctance to sign an association agreement with the European Union. The movement, which came to be known as Euromaidan, endured for months, culminating in violent clashes between demonstrators and law enforcement officers, ultimately leading to Yanukovich's ouster.

Russian officials and state media outlets have presented Euromaidan as a Western-sponsored attempt to wreak havoc in Russia's traditional sphere of influence and propel Ukraine into a state of chaos and war.

The Anti-Maidan movement will have its own headquarters, executive committee and membership base, TASS reported.

Sablin is spearheading the movement with the help of an eclectic crowd of Russian celebrities, including the leader of a patriotic biker gang, a female mixed martial arts fighter, and a conservative blogger with a penchant for controversy.

Alexander "the Surgeon" Zaldostanov is the leader of the Night Wolves, a group of more than 5,000 bikers who love their country and have repeatedly manifested their support for President Vladimir Putin, who was famously pictured riding a Harley Davidson trike alongside the Surgeon in 2009.

The Night Wolves and their leader, who is reportedly a close acquaintance of Putin's, landed on the U.S. sanctions list last month. Announcing the decision to target the group, the U.S. Treasury said in a statement: "The Night Wolves have been closely connected to the Russian special services, have helped to recruit separatist fighters for Donetsk and Luhansk, Ukraine, and were deployed to the cities of Luhansk and Kharkiv."

The U.S. Treasury added a slew of other allegations against the group, including its suspected role in the storming of the Ukrainian Naval Headquarters in Sevastopol. According to the statement, the Surgeon "coordinated the confiscation of Ukrainian weapons with the Russian forces."

Yulia Berezikova, a 31-year-old professional fighter, is also reportedly slated to join the initiative. In addition to having racked up numerous mixed martial arts wins, she has had some success as a model as well, having posed topless for a Russian men's magazine in 2008.

Nikolai Starikov is reportedly also on-board for the Anti-Maidan. The conservative blogger has courted controversy in the past, after he polled his readers on people deserving of a "Goebbels award," a morbid distinction for "vilifying" Russia, named after Nazi Germany's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels.

Sablin, who announced the creation of Anti-Maidan, has likewise seen his share of scandal in the past. Before the State Duma approved a bill seeking to ban "gay propaganda" in its first reading in January 2013, Sablin said Russia was not "Sodom and Gomorrah," Biblical cities that often serve as a metaphor for vice and homosexuality, Russian media reported at the time.

The Anti-Maidan movement's founders have pledged to rally in the same locales used by opposition activists, including central Moscow's Manezh Square. They have not excluded the possibility that the movement could spread beyond Russia's borders, TASS reported.

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