

Dozens Rally in New York to Protest Killing of Boris Nemtsov

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Protesters, mostly of Russian or Ukrainian origin, hold protest signs denouncing Russian President Vladimir Putin near the Russian permanent mission to the United Nations in New York, Mar. 1, 2015.

NEW YORK — Dozens of protesters have rallied in New York City near the Russian permanent mission to the United Nations to denounce the murder of Kremlin critic Boris Nemtsov, despite fear of reprisals to themselves or family members back in Russia.

Protesters, most of them of Russian or Ukrainian origin, held photographs of the slain opposition leader. Many carried signs that read "Putin Plague of 21st Century" and "Stop Dictator Putin — Stop Murderers," referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is denounced as an autocrat by a small but vocal opposition.

The rally, staged Sunday — on the same day that tens of thousands of Russians marched through central Moscow — featured a dash of street theater. A young Russian student had locked himself into a hand-made cardboard cage, which he said symbolized the struggle of political prisoners.

Even though the rally on Manhattan's Upper East Side was thousands of miles away from the Kremlin, some of the protesters expressed concern about joining public demonstrations against the Putin government.

"I know a lot of people who are discouraged to come because they're scared that their pictures or names appearing in the news will cause problems for their relatives back in Russia," Dmitry Smelansky, a 50-year old engineer who traveled to New York from Boston to take part in the rally.

Like many of the other protesters, Smelansky saw the murder of Nemtsov as a rallying point against Putin and his policies. While Smelansky did not directly blame Putin for the killing, he said the former KGB agent had created a climate "filled with hatred" in his homeland.

"I hope it will reinvigorate protest because a lot of people will realize the problem is not only with Ukraine," he said, referring to Putin's support of Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. "They can't pretend that nothing happened anymore."

Igor, a Russian-American Internet specialist who lives in Brooklyn, declined to give his last name, saying he feared reprisals for taking part in the anti-Putin protests.

"If they're going to see me here protesting, I'm pretty sure they'll be able to find my family and friends and make their lives a living hell, or ever worse," he said, wearing a cap and a hood to obscure his face.

"I know the assassination of Nemtsov was probably a first of a series of acts they plan."

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