

Polish Border Guards Refuse Entry to Russia's Night Wolves Bikers

April 27, 2015



Polish motorbikers wait for members of Russian motorbikers group "Night Wolves" to cross the EU border in Terespol Apr. 27.

TERESPOL, Poland — Polish border guards on Monday blocked entry into Poland for 10 Russian bikers who said they were following a path commemorating the Red Army's victory over Nazi Germany 70 years ago.

Border guard spokesman Dariusz Sienicki announced the decision after members of the Night Wolves, a nationalistic Russian group loyal to President Vladimir Putin, approached the border and tried to enter Poland.

Polish authorities said last week they would ban entry for the group, with leaders calling their plans to ride through Poland as part of World War II commemorations a provocation. The Night Wolves vowed to enter anyway and 15 were seen Monday morning at the border crossing between Brest, Belarus, and Terespol, Poland.

Belarussian guards let them pass but they were then held in a hangar by Polish officials.

"These people will not cross into Poland. Each of them will individually receive a decision denying them entry into Poland's territory," Sienicki said.

Some Russian bikers had been seen entering Poland earlier but they appeared to belong to another organization whose members are allowed entry.

Many Poles view the Night Wolves with suspicion because the pro-Putin bikers have rallied against the Ukrainian government and celebrated Russia's annexation of Crimea.

"This is not a normal bike club. They are tools in the hand of Vladimir Putin to make propaganda," said Tomasz Czuwara, spokesman for the Open Dialog Foundation, a Polish group that supports Ukraine.

The German government has also expressed unease at the bikers and said they would not be welcome.

"There's nothing illegal about it by itself," said German foreign ministry spokesman Martin Schaefer. "We deeply treasure freedom of speech and freedom of assembly in Germany. But we've decided that some of the leaders in the Night Wolves are not pursuing legitimate aims with these plans."

Not all Poles are against them, however. The head of a Polish bikers' group, Wiktor Wegrzyn, called the Polish opposition to the bikers "anti-Russia hysteria." He and dozens of other Polish bikers gathered on the Polish side of the border Monday to greet and escort the Night Wolves in case they should make it through.

The Night Wolves want to travel across Eastern Europe to honor the Red Army soldiers who died in the Allied defeat of Hitler's Germany, visiting their graves and other war sites. Their aim was to arrive in Berlin for ceremonies marking the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II on May 8.

The Russian bikers left Russia on Saturday and on Sunday they paid homage in Russia at a memorial to Polish soldiers killed in the Katyn massacres by the Soviet Union during World War II.

(AP, Reuters)

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/04/27/polish-border-guards-refuse-entry-to-russias-night-wolves-bikers-a46141>