

Berlin Court Overturns Night Wolves' Entry Ban

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Alexander "Surgeon" Zaldostanov proudly leading a column of "Night Wolves" into Brest, Belarus on April 28.

After German authorities canceled the visas of some of the members of patriotic Russian biker group the Night Wolves, a Berlin court overturned on Wednesday the entry ban that was imposed against them.

The Night Wolves had planned to mark the 70th anniversary of the Allied victory over Nazi Germany in World War II by riding their motorbikes from Moscow to Berlin, but they were denied entry into Germany last month, after having been denied entry to Poland.

The Berlin court found insufficient evidence that the bikers constituted a "threat to public order, domestic security or international relations," ruling that their European Union visas would be valid in Germany, The Associated Press reported.

The Night Wolves had vowed earlier on Wednesday to sue over some of its members' deportations from Germany and the cancellation of their Schengen visas.

"We will receive justice because we are right according to all understandings of human and legal norms," Zaldostanov told Kommersant FM radio station Wednesday. "What the European Union is doing right now is pure bestiality."

Andrei Bobrovsky, the organizer of the group's European tour, told the radio station that some 20 members of the Night Wolves had been turned away as they attempted to enter the EU, suffering collective financial losses of three million rubles (\$60,000), Kommersant reported.

Bobrovsky added that the group was planning to sue the EU, as well as the authorities of either Germany or Poland, depending on which of these countries had "instigated" the entry bans against its members.

It remains unclear whether the Night Wolves will go through with their lawsuits following the Berlin court's decision to overturn the cancellation of their visas.

The Night Wolves arrived Prague on Tuesday night. They plan to cross the Czech Republic's border with Germany on Thursday.

The group has vowed to mark Victory Day in Berlin on Saturday, despite official warnings that their planned celebrations in the German capital were undesirable.

The Night Wolves did not respond to a request for comment in time for publication.

Meanwhile, leading opposition activist Alexei Navalny alleged that the group had received millions of rubles in government grants over the past year and a half, with some of the funds allocated for staging anti-Western shows for children.

The Night Wolves and their associated groups, all affiliated with biker leader Alexander Zaldostanov, have received 56 million rubles (\$1.1 million at the current exchange rate) of taxpayer money over the past year and a half, the report published Tuesday on the website Navalny.com said.

Zaldostanov, known as "The Surgeon," is an associate of President Vladimir Putin and has periodically appeared in public with the Russian leader, but little has been disclosed previously about the funding behind the biker group's grand-scale nationalistic performances.

The shows include holiday concerts for children casting the West as a bogeyman bent on destroying Russia.

"Russia must be deprived of freedom, Slavic peoples need to be chained, peace should be built on their blood, those who disagree must die," read a poem recited by a Western character in a New Year's show staged by the bikers.

The bikers received 12.5 million rubles (\$250,000) from the National Charitable Fund for their New Year's shows over the past two years, according to Navalny's report.

"Our goal is to create an alternative to foreign dominance," Zaldostanov was quoted as saying after the past New Year's performance by news agency RIA Novosti. "The educational goal of the show is very important."

The holiday shows — known in Russia as "novogodniye yolki," or "New Year trees" — are a fixture of the winter holidays in the country, dating back to the Soviet era, and have traditionally featured fairy tale characters in non-political stories about love and friendship.

But recent years have seen some changes.

A holiday show in the Russian city of Lipetsk, some 400 kilometers south of Moscow, this year featured American characters threatening Russia with sanctions, and Russian characters boasting of their country's nuclear arsenal and denouncing the West's "stupidity."

A show staged by the Night Wolves in 2013 featured a character representing the Statue of Liberty kidnapping Russia's snow maiden, Snegurochka, in an attempt to ruin Russia.

The show ends with Russian forces triumphing and the hero proclaiming in a poem with apparent religious undertones that the country will defeat its foes "no matter how hard foreign believers try."

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