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Navalny: Russian Bikers Given Grants to Stage Anti-Western Shows for Kids

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Leader of the motorcycle club Night Wolves, Alexander Zaldostanov (front), nicknamed "Khirurg" (Surgeon), together with participants of a bike ride commemorating the 70th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in World War Two, arrives at the Russian consulate general in Brest, Belarus, April 28, 2015.

Russia's nationalistic biker group the Night Wolves has received millions of rubles in government grants over the past year and a half, with some of the money allocated for staging anti-Western shows for children, a report by opposition activist Alexei Navalny has claimed.

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 rate) of taxpayer money over the past year and a half, the report published Tuesday on the Navalny.com website said.

Zaldostanov, known as “The Surgeon,” is an associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin and has repeatedly 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 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 the foreign dominance,” Zaldastanov 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 “stupidity” of the West.

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.”

The Night Wolves recently tried to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Allied victory over Nazi Germany in World War II by riding their motorbikes to Berlin, but Poland denied the group entry and the German government has canceled the visas of some people believed to belong to the group's leadership.

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