

Vigilantes From Putin's Party to Patrol Moscow's Streets – Report

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The patrollers, who will be provided with uniforms bearing their party's name and logo, will film petty criminals in action and upload evidence of the mischief to an online "wall of shame," according to the report.

The ruling United Russia party will form neighborhood patrols to maintain order and thwart petty crime on the streets of Moscow, the Kommersant newspaper reported Wednesday, citing an unnamed source in the party.

Since the adoption last year of legislation permitting citizen participation in maintaining order, pro-Kremlin vigilantes have assumed new roles in policing the streets and standing up for traditional values. The new United Russia vigilantes, who are set to begin their operations later this month or in early June, will be recruited from among private security companies, defense-oriented organizations and Cossack quasi-military associations, according to Kommersant's source.

The patrol teams, which will be comprised of three to four individuals with "athletic builds," will be expected to monitor the capital's neighborhoods at least one Friday night a month, the report said. Their goal: crack down on petty crime, illegal parking and drug trafficking, and humiliate violators of public order. The pro-Putin vigilantes, in tandem with City Hall's safety department and law enforcement officers, will map the crimes that are committed throughout the Russian capital.

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Kommersant's source did not rule out the possibility that the United Russia vigilantes could be called upon to patrol opposition rallies, which have been presented by state-run media outlets as breeding grounds for color revolutions.

The United Russia vigilantes will share Moscow's streets with Cossack brigades, members of a quasi-military group found mainly in Russia and Ukraine. The Cossacks announced in March that 1,400 of their members would be mobilized to hunt down the draft dodgers who are hiding from authorities in the sprawl of Moscow. The group had already begun patrolling Moscow's parks in December, working alongside police officers to curb drinking in public and other minor offenses.

A survey conducted last month by the Levada Center, an independent pollster based in Moscow, found that 68 percent of Russians headed to the polls already knowing which party to vote for would cast their ballot for United Russia if parliamentary elections had taken place at the time. The poll, conducted among a representative sample of 1,600 adults across 46 regions and carrying a margin of error no greater than 3.4 percent, also showed that all of Russia's other political parties trailed far behind United Russia in the population's voting intentions.

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