The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Crimean Lawmaker Refuses to Duel With Night Wolves' Chief Over Land Dispute

By Howard Amos

May 25, 2015



Leader of the motorcycling club Night Wolves Alexander Zaldostanov, nicknamed "Khirurg" (Surgeon), performs during a festive concert marking the 70th anniversary of the end of World War Two in Europe, at Red Square in Moscow, Russia, May 9, 2015.

A top Crimean official declined a proposed duel over a land dispute with the head of Russia's nationalist Night Wolves biker group Monday, according to a Russian media report.

The head of Sevastopol's legislative assembly, Alexei Chaly, who was a key figure in the Russian annexation of Crimea, refused a fight with the head of the Night Wolves, Alexander Zaldostanov, otherwise known as "the Surgeon," according to a report by Russian tabloid LifeNews.

“If they come and see him, he is always at work and always ready to talk,” the press secretary of Sevastopol's legislative assembly, Yelena Kazakova, told LifeNews.

Last week, Chaly objected to the planned allocation of 267 hectares of land near Sevastopol to the bikers and called for a “broad public discussion” about the proposal, the Kommersant business daily reported.

Sevastopol mayor Sergei Menyailo subsequently halted the land transfer process, according to local media reports.

The Night Wolves were allotted the land in question earlier this month at a 99.9 percent discount to develop a "patriotic sports and healthy living center," according to a decree published by the local administration. The low rent took into account the "non-profit" and "socially orientated" nature of the group, the decree added.

The biker group, which is famous for enjoying the support of President Vladimir Putin, did not react well to the news that it might not immediately receive the land. Zaldostanov went to Sevastopol's legislative assembly with a loudspeaker to call Chaly out over the weekend.

“On any information resource, for any audience you will receive an answer to all your lies and incompetence,” the tattooed biker is seen saying in video footage published on YouTube.

Crimea has witnessed a dramatic redivision of property since Moscow's annexation of the peninsula from Ukraine last year. A formal nationalization process has at times taken violent turns.

The land slated to be given to the Night Wolves, which includes a lake, is reportedly held under a long-term lease by a company owned by Ukrainian billionaire and federal lawmaker Vadim Novinsky.

The Night Wolves and supporters of Chaly both played key roles in fomenting pro-Russian sentiment in Crimea in the early stages of Moscow's 2014 takeover. Chaly was installed as a so-called people's mayor in Sevastopol in February 2014, and was one of several representatives from the region who signed the official annexation agreement with Putin the following month in Moscow.

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Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/05/25/crimean-lawmaker-refuses-to-duel-with-night-wolves-chief-over-land-dispute-a46820