

Conservative Activists Drive Popular Kubana Festival Out of Russia

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One of Russia's largest rock festivals will be transplanted to the Latvian capital of Riga in light of a recent determination by Kaliningrad regional authorities that they would be unable to protect concertgoers from conservative activists.

Municipal lawmakers in the Kaliningrad region's Yantarny district decided last week to cancel the famed Kubana festival, citing security concerns amid mounting outrage from hedonism-wary activists.

A regional Russian Orthodox Church leader had blasted the event for its "blatant immorality" in late April. "Upon familiarizing myself with publicly available information about this festival, I was simply shocked: complete degradation, malfeasance, alcoholism," Baltic Bishop Serafim said in a statement on the Kaliningrad Eparchy's website.

Kubana festival producer Ilya Ostrovsky told The Moscow Times in a phone interview that activists had essentially driven the concert out of Russia. "The problem that we faced

in Kaliningrad was that activists and some locals really did not want to see us there," he said.

After the cancellation in Kaliningrad, other Russian regions offered to host Kubana, but the organizers thought it would be better to relocate to Latvia.

"Unfortunately, the problem that we faced in Kaliningrad could have happened in any Russian region," Ostrovsky said, noting that he plans to make the festival a Riga staple for the foreseeable future.

Ostrovsky did not believe the international move would deal a major blow to audience numbers. "Our target audience tends to include a lot of travelers, so we don't expect the move to cause our numbers to dwindle. The type of fans that are attracted to our festival are the type of people who would have no trouble getting a Schengen visa," he said.

Leading rock and indie musicians from around the globe had flocked to Russia's Krasnodar region to perform in the Kubana festival every year since 2009. But a spate of recent scandals caused the event to lose favor in Krasnodar in recent years.

Krasnodar authorities announced in April that they planned to monitor an upcoming concert by Noize MC for signs of extremism in light of his performance in Krasnodar last year.

In 2013, the Kubana festival made international headlines after its headliners — U.S. band Bloodhound Gang — ran afoul of Russian authorities. A criminal case was launched after video footage surfaced of the band's drummer wiping his nether regions with a Russian flag.

The concert is now set to take place on Riga's Lucasvala Island on Aug. 6–9.

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