

Cossack Guards: Coming to a Store and School Near You

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Cossacks are competing to win government contracts to serve as security guards at Moscow schools and stores, a move that could serve to hasten their expanding role within Russian society as conservative social enforcers and for-hire lawmen.

"We are taking part in contests and tenders, and as soon as we win we will man our posts. We might protect schools, stores, and government buildings as well," said Andrei Shustrov, the head of the Moscow Cossacks, the local M24 news site reported Thursday.

The Cossacks are a quasi-military group found in Russia and parts of Ukraine that once served the Russian tsars but were persecuted by Soviet authorities. Under President Vladimir Putin's national revival, the Cossacks have been embraced as defenders of Orthodox order and patriotic virtues by Russian authorities.

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and city beaches, and combat drinking in public spaces and smoking in prohibited areas. Next year, Cossacks will begin regular patrols of Moscow streets, trading their horses for motorcycles, M24 reported.

The group draw sharp attention last year during the Sochi Olympics when they patrolled the Black Sea resort city in their traditional uniforms, and at one point attacked protest group Pussy Riot with tear gas and horse whips.

The Cossacks gained further attention in March when they contracted with Moscow military enlistment offices to crack down on draft dodging during the spring draft, which took place from April 1 to July 15, following medical exams conducted in February and March.

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