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Russia's Protesting Truckers Send Critical Message to Putin

By Anna Dolgov

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A police officer walks past a line of trucks, whose drivers are taking part in a protest against a new fee, at a parking lot in the Moscow region, Russia.

Russia's protesting truck drivers issued an acerbic video message to President Vladimir Putin on Constitution Day this weekend, saying citizens' wishes are ignored under his rule and he might as well scrap the provision for people's power from the document.

Taking turns to speak in the video that was released to mark Constitution Day on Saturday, truckers wished "dear" Putin a happy holiday, but voiced their dismay at what they described as a gap between the law and reality.

"We've reread the text of the Constitution, and Article 3 states: 'The sole source of power in the Russian Federation is its multiethnic people,'" a protest activist said in the video. "But in fact this doesn't happen."

“Dear guarantor of the Constitution! If the people of our country no longer get to decide anything, please be so kind as to bring the text of the Constitution in accordance with reality,” an activist said in the video message to Putin.

Truckers said that an alternative to changing the Constitution would be to hold a nationwide referendum on whether to implement or scrap the new tax system, known as Platon — vowing to accept the results of a ballot.

Polls indicate that a vast majority of Russians support the truckers' protest, another activist said. The drivers are fighting a new tax system, known as Platon, that levies additional fees on heavy trucks for the use of federal highways. Truckers are adamant that this would erode their earnings.

A poll released by the independent Levada Center last week indicated that 71 percent of Moscow residents who are aware of the protest support the truckers' action.

The truckers' protest has been going on for weeks, and while the drivers have made no political demands, their action marks the first large-scale demonstration of popular dissent in years.

Truckers have established two camps on the outskirts of the Russian capital and have shown no signs of relenting.

The protesters — comprised of truckers from 56 regions around the country — elected a leader during a meeting last week, and have enlisted a spokeswoman, opposition-minded Grani.ru news portal reported.

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