

Russians Hold Irreverent Rally in Support of the Ruble

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Activists in southern Russia held a rally billed as an action in support of the shrinking ruble, but intended as a tongue-in-cheek reminder to Russians that their economic hardships were a result of government policies, according to news reports and social media accounts over the weekend.

In the city of Rostov-on-Don in the southern Rostov region, demonstrators held signs that read: “Je suis ruble,” “I demand finding those who ordered and carried out the murder of the ruble,” and “The ruble hasn't fallen, it has only slipped. On [a slab of] salo,” according to photos posted Saturday by local residents' group “Rostovnadonu” on Facebook.

Salo is a traditional dish of cured pork fat, popular in Russia and Ukraine. The “salo” in the demonstrators' sign alludes to the ruble's nosedive after the Kremlin annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and backed separatist insurgents in eastern Ukraine — incurring Western economic sanctions amid Russia's already struggling economy.

“Indecent behavior by the ruble: How low you have fallen!” another sign read. “Get up, it's time to catch up with Africa.”

“We wanted to hold this kind of a jocular action, because one can no longer watch without humor the condition into which the authorities have driven the economy,” one of the rally organizers, Yana Goncharova, was quoted as saying by Radio Svoboda, the Ukrainian language service of RFE/RL.

“We wanted city residents to look at the signs, and, feeling the irony, consider the question of which actions of the government have put the ruble into such a pitiful state, remember Crimea and the Donbass, tensions in relations with all the neighbors and partners, and everything else that has led to sanctions and an economic collapse.”

A vast majority of Russians cheered the annexation of Crimea, sending Russian President Vladimir Putin's domestic approval ratings soaring to a record high of 89 percent last summer. But continuing economic troubles have started to erode Russians' approval for their country's policies, according to a survey released in late January by independent Levada Center pollster.

The rally in Rostov-on-Don had been approved by the city administration, Svoboda reported. No participants were detained, but police took down the organizers' names and other personal information, the report said.

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