

Russians in London Protest Ukraine War, Kremlin Crackdown

By [Yulia Mineeva](#)

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Russians protest in London against the war in Ukraine. **Yulia Mineeva**

LONDON, United Kingdom – Hundreds of Russians turned out Sunday in central London to demand the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine and protest against growing authoritarianism in their home country.

Joined by Belarusians and Ukrainians, protesters were a mix of longtime London residents and young people newly arrived in the United Kingdom.

“It is important now to show that not all Russians support war and the killing of civilians. We are in solidarity with Ukraine,” said Alexander, 31, who moved from Moscow to London in March to take up a new job.

The protesters gathered in London’s Parliament Square, near a monument to World War II leader Winston Churchill.

Among the crowd, some young Russians draped themselves in the white and blue flags that have become the symbol of a Russia's anti-war movement.

Others were wearing T-shirts with messages of support for prominent opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who is currently in prison outside Moscow.

The wide age range of protesters set this rally apart from past ones, according to Ksenia, 36, a Russian-born producer who organized the event.

"There's the most diverse crowd here today," she said. "In London, the same people have always gone to the protests: mostly those who moved here a long time ago and don't go to Russia often. [But] this time there are a lot of young people. We tried to attract new people who hadn't come out before."

Anti-war rallies organized by a local group called Russians Against War have been held in London every week since early April. But Sunday's gathering was the largest such event since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Liza, 32, is a coordinator for "Russians Against War" and an IT specialist who moved to the UK from St. Petersburg four years ago. Like other participants, she requested anonymity to speak freely, telling The Moscow Times that Sunday's protest was the largest event she had ever organized.

Speakers included economist Andrei Movchan and the executive director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation Vladimir Ashurkov, as well as Alexei Zimin, editor-in-chief of local Russian-language magazine ZIMA, and Marina Litvinenko, the wife of former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko, who was poisoned with polonium in London in 2006.

They were joined by UK public figures, including Labour Party deputy John McDonnell and activist and journalist Paul Mason.

The demonstration took place on May 8, the day Britain traditionally marks the end of World War II — the day before the same event is marked in Russia with lavish celebrations including military parades in major cities.

Many here do not share the excitement relayed by Russian state-run television about Victory Day, which has been used by President Vladimir Putin in recent years to boost pride in the Armed Forces and promote patriotism.

"I now consider Victory Day in Russia not a celebration of peace, but a celebration of war and a show-off," said Alexander, who was attending the London rally with his wife and baby.

"War is terrible, it's not about songs and fireworks, but a tragedy that destroys lives. I will try to ignore the news about May 9 celebration, it will be hard for me to see it," said Diana, a student who moved to Manchester from the Siberian city of Tyumen three years ago.

Unlike in previous years, London did not host a so-called "Immortal Regiment" march, an annual Victory Day demonstration in which hundreds of thousands in Russia and abroad commemorate relatives who died in World War II. The Moscow event is often attended by Putin.

The British authorities this year “banned the march and a flower-laying ceremony,” Sergei Makarov, the co-chairman of the Russian Immortal Regiment movement, [told](#) a press conference in Moscow last month.

Protesters Sunday also expressed their opposition to an escalating crackdown on anti-government sentiment inside Russia. Chants in support of political prisoners in Russia and Belarus were heard alongside chants calling for an end to the war in Ukraine.

Even in London, there was fear of retribution for criticizing the Kremlin and expressing anti-war opinions. Most participants at the rally refused to give their surnames, and some hid their faces from cameras.

"There is definitely still fear in some people," said Ksenia, a volunteer.

On the other hand, Diana said she was pleased to be able to stand next to Big Ben and hold a blue and white flag without fear of being arrested.

"People in Russia are not allowed to publicly express their opinions, so I'm here for my Russian friends who can't go protesting," she said.

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