

Pro-Putin Bikers Launch Rally Bound for Berlin

By [AFP](#)

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Alexander Zaldostanov (C), also known as "Khirurg" (The Surgeon), a leader of the Night Wolves bikers' club, leads a convoy opening the season in Moscow, carrying a banner bearing a mixture of Soviet and Russian symbols. **Alexander Nemenov / AFP**

Hundreds of Kremlin-loyal bikers under the banner of the Night Wolves motorcycle club took to the streets of Moscow on Saturday for a "patriotic" rally across Europe.

The motorcade headed by club founder and leader Alexander Zaldastanov, known as "The Surgeon," aims to complete the rally in Berlin by May 9.

Several participants at the rally waved Russian and Soviet flags. Some had the letter "Z" fixed to their bikes — a symbol of Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine launched in February 2022.

Dubbed "the roads of victory," the rally adopted the traditional slogan of the Russian

offensive in Ukraine: "We do not let down our own."

According to organizers, the motorcade plans to reach by May 1 the city of Volgograd, formerly Stalingrad, the site of a bloody battle between Soviet and German Nazi troops that marked a turning point in World War II toward victory for the Soviet Union and its allies.

The bikers will continue their journey to the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine, the scene of heavy fighting, where they will distribute humanitarian aid to civilians and Russian soldiers.

"The inhabitants of the Donbas and us, we are the same people," 34-year-old Artyom told AFP before embarking on the race.

Zaldastanov, who has described himself as a "friend" of Russian President Vladimir Putin, is under Western sanctions for his support for the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the Russian offensive in Ukraine.

In May 2015, he was banned from entering Poland, where he wanted to organize "a motorcycle victory rally" across Europe. The ban had provoked the ire of Russian diplomacy.

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