

# MVD Enforcing Ideological Conformity Within Its Ranks

By [Paul Goble](#)

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**Window on Eurasia** covers current events in Russia and the nations of the former Soviet Union, with a focus on issues of ethnicity and religion. The issues covered are often not those written about on the front pages of newspapers. Instead, the articles in the Windows series focus on those issues that either have not been much discussed or provide an approach to stories that have been. Frequent topics include civil rights, radicalism, Russian Islam, the Russian Orthodox Church, and events in the North Caucasus, among others.

Author **Paul Goble** is a longtime specialist on ethnic and religious questions in Eurasia. Most recently, he was director of research and publications at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. He has served in various capacities in the U.S. State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency and the International Broadcasting Bureau as well as at the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He writes frequently on ethnic and religious issues and has edited five volumes on ethnicity and religion in the former Soviet space.

VIENNA &mdash Even as the debate continues as to whether or not the Moscow militia invited representatives of extremist groups to be part of its advisory council, an officer in the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) says his agency is "squeezing out" from its own ranks anyone who thinks differently than the regime.

In [the latest letter](#) to Novaya Gazeta observer Yury Geyko &mdash two others were published in September &mdash Yury Romanov, who identifies himself as "still for the time being an officer of the Russian militia," says that "it is not difficult to land on a black list" inside the MVD often just for "having principles which contradict the system."

Once commanders decide that an officer is on this list of people who do not ideologically conform to the regime, Romanov continues, they have various ways to get rid of them, either by creating conditions under which such individuals can be fired or cause them to leave the service in disgust.

Most of the "levers" that the commanders use are financial in character, a result of the low pay of militiamen and the absence of alternative employment for many of them. Officers can be selectively marked down for any number of minor violations of the rules or even because they find themselves in a catch-22 situation in which the rules point in contradictory directions.

Officers who don't share the ideological views of their superiors can also be targeted for failure to fill out forms in a timely fashion, even if others are not penalized for the same actions, and are even accused of "systematic violation" of their official responsibilities for what are essentially meaningless actions.

Such officers are routinely given black marks for failing to pass physical fitness or shooting standards which neither they nor anyone else in their units has the opportunity to pass because of the absence of training facilities or time. "Many militiamen would be glad to raise their professional level," Romanov says, "if only there were opportunities to do so."

And finally, these potential dissidents can be assigned cases that either are cold or otherwise problematic, ensuring that they will not have the kind of successes that would lead to preferment and promotion, an arrangement that objectively looks entirely fair but Romanov says is set up to punish those who disagree.

As a result, the dissidents are being weeded out and "already very soon, those few honest and principled officers who still remain will take their pensions and leave. Then crime in Russia will show its true face, but there will be nothing to oppose it. This will happen in the not-distant future, perhaps 3 or 4 years or perhaps earlier. The clock is ticking."

In a comment appended to Romanov's letter, Geyko notes that there is a proposal to improve things in the militia that would not require more money or radical changes in existing legislation. Instead, it would eliminate much of the work that commanders are employing to control their subordinates.

Unfortunately, the Novaya Gazeta analyst continues, senior MVD officials are against the adoption of this program because it would reduce their ability to sit in "warm places" and extract money from various sources and, more importantly, "not allow them to reduce crime [in Russia] by manipulating statistics alone."

That such commanders, already notorious for corruption, may also have a very specific ideological agenda that they are seeking to impose on their subordinates makes any information about such attitudes especially important even if, as is often the case, the information available is both indirect and not unproblematic.

This week, a report subsequently denied by senior MVD officials but apparently confirmed by others involved raises interesting questions in this regard. On Wednesday, [Interfax reported](#) that Viktor Biryukov, a spokesman for the Moscow city Internal Affairs Administration, had made a remarkable declaration.

Biryukov said his agency had invited representatives of more than 20 youth groups to join the social council attached to the Internal Affairs Administration. Among those were groups like Nashi and A Just Russia, but there were also others that were far more notorious,

including the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) and the Slavic Union (SS).

Given the xenophobic attitudes of DPNI and the openly anti-Semitic view of the SS, many in Moscow and elsewhere were shocked, and in [the words of Kommersant today](#), the MVD "disavowed" the report that the DPNI, the SS and any other extremist groups had been invited to be members.

But according to Kommersant &mdash; and it is important to note that this Moscow newspaper has sometimes carried stories that later turn out to be at variance with the facts &mdash; both the DPNI and the SS have been included, something the paper says it has confirmed through conversations with Interior Ministry officials and leaders of both these groups.

One MVD official said there had been "discussions" over whether to invite representatives of these groups to what he insisted was a body "without official status" and therefore open to "any organization which wants to cooperate with the militia and any person interested in such cooperation." Indeed, he said, conversations with groups like the DPNI are useful.

Dmitry Demushkin, the leader of the radical SS, told Kommersant that his group had reached an agreement with the Moscow internal affairs authorized "already last winter" and added that he and his colleagues meet "constantly" with the leadership of the interior ministry and city government before demonstrations.

Earlier, Demushkin continued, "the leaders of many departments ... preferred not to advertise that they dealt with us, but now [the Moscow MVD leadership] has even offered us a sports hall for a football match between members of the SS." That is evidence, he said, of "the most constructive relations."

Demushkin added that his group "is not an opposition movement in the pure sense." After all, he pointed out, the SS "does not have among its slogans 'Down with Putin!'" But that declaration may disturb even more people, especially since among the invitees to the MVD sessions were not members of other groups including the Anti-Fascist Movement.

One of its leaders told Kommersant that he was in no way surprised by the close relations between the MVD and the SWS. Demushkin has been close to the militia for a long time, he said. "There have been repeated cases when, after a fight," the SS leader was able to secure the release of his supporters.

Indeed, the anti-fascist leader said it was beginning to look as if "the militia and the Nazis have decided to get married or at least to live together. Naturally, what is interesting is whether the Nazis will now rub out their tattoos which say 'All Cops are Bastards'" &mdash; or whether that English-language phrase won't offend the Russian militia.

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