

Court Bans Leading Nationalist Group

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A Moscow court on Monday declared that the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, a leading nationalist group, was extremist and banned its activities.

The ruling by the Moscow City Court came in response to a request from city prosecutors, the Prosecutor General's Office said on its web site. Activists who ignore the ban now face a year in prison.

The group's leader, Alexander Belov, vowed to appeal and warned that the ban would lead to youths rallying in the streets in "masks," unchecked by an organized leadership, Reuters reported.

His group, known by its Russian acronym DPNI, was behind annual Russian March rallies that saw demonstrators shout racist slurs and make "Heil Hitler"-like salutes.

The court ban was welcomed by Alexander Verkhovsky, head of Sova, the country's leading group for tracking hate crimes, who said DPNI members were involved in violent crimes motivated by ethnic hatred, Interfax reported.

The Federal Migration Service also praised the ban, Interfax said.

Last April, the Moscow City Court banned another leading ultranationalist organization, the Slavic Union.

Deadly racist violence is on the decline after President Dmitry Medvedev ordered the police to stamp it out. A total of 419 people were victims of hate crimes in Russia last year, and 37 of them died, compared with 518 victims, including 52 deaths, in 2009, according to Sova. A total of 201 of last year's crimes were committed in Moscow and the Moscow region. They resulted in 19 deaths.

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